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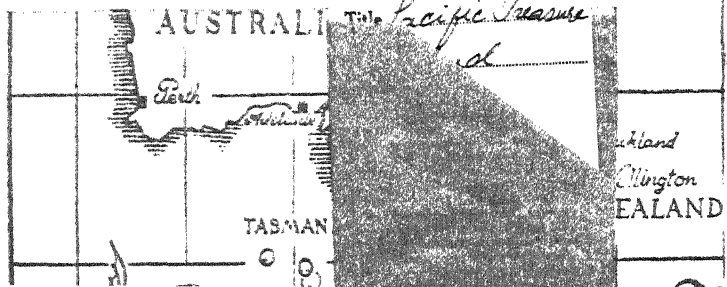
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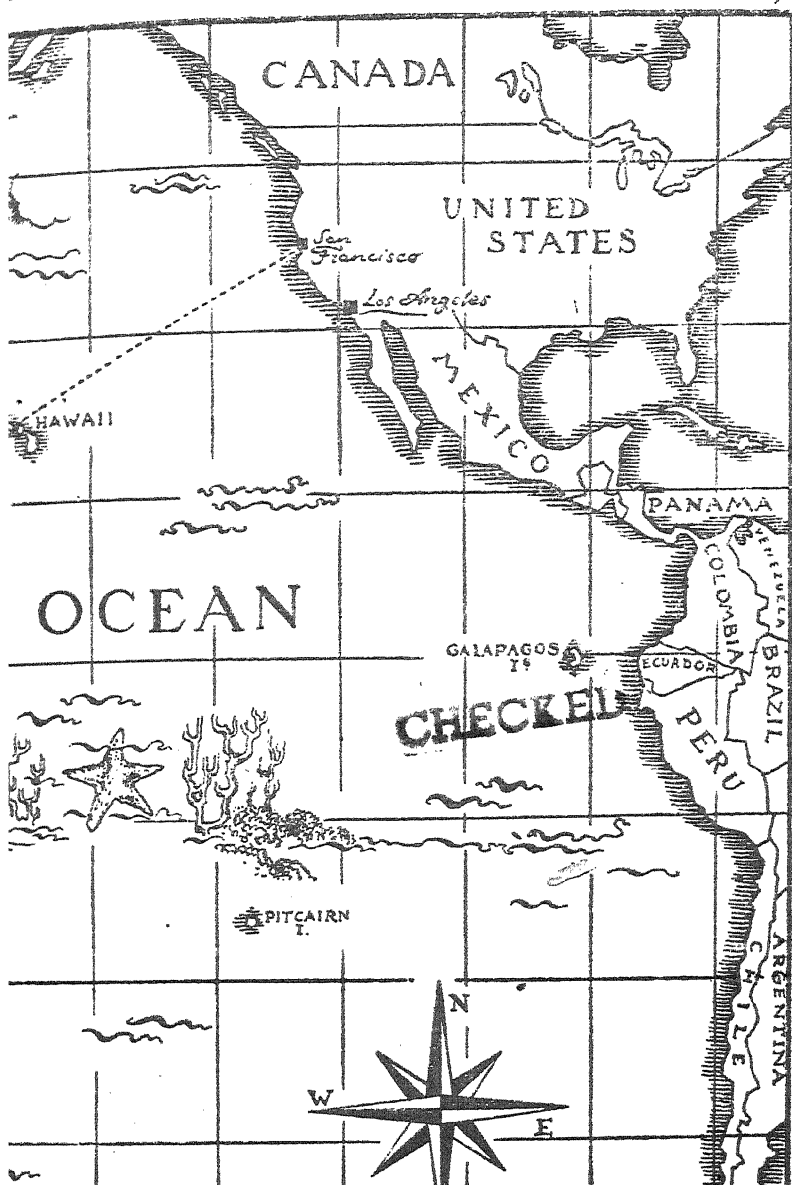
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# PACIFIC TREASURE ISLAND

NEW CALEDONIA

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Voyage through its land and wealth  
The story of its people and past

BY

WILFRED G. BURCHETT

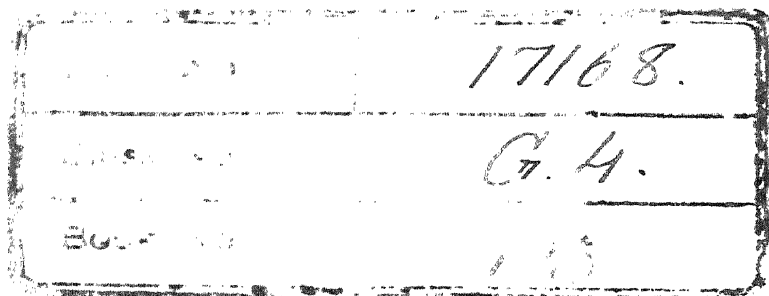
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W. G. BURCHETT.

September, 1941.

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## INTRODUCTION

THE growing importance of the Pacific makes an apology for writing a book on New Caledonia unnecessary. For many years this island has been but a name to most of us. In Australia it was a name that featured once or twice a year as the goal of a tourist cruise to the South Seas ; in America a name that appeared on the schedule of Pan-American Airways Trans-Pacific Air Service ; in the rest of the world the name New Caledonia—if it suggested anything at all—vaguely recalled the site of a particularly odious convict prison. Except for a few fortunate people who had invested in New Caledonian nickel or chrome mines, little interest was taken in the place.

It has taken the cold implacable march of the world events to make us in Australia realize that here is a land, rich in economic resources, with invaluable harbourages, with land- and air-bases of great strategic importance within a few hours' flight of our capital cities. It would have been much more flattering to us had our interest been aroused earlier by the proximity to our shores of an outpost of French culture, a country only a few days' boat voyage distant, where one could hear and speak the French language, enjoy French customs and food, and generally imbibe French atmosphere, when the size of one's purse didn't permit a trip to the Continent. Certainly Noumea is a poor substitute for Paris—but for most of us that don't know Paris, Noumea is a French metropolis with all the attractions and otherwise that one looks for in a centre of French life.

As far as Australia is concerned, it is a reflection on our parochialism that it has needed the present war and the collapse of France to arouse our interest in this immensely wealthy island, with its unique and diverse population, so close to our shores.

The Pacific is the world of the future. There are signs aplenty that it is now coming into its own ; that as the old

Mediterranean world gave way in importance to the wider world of the Atlantic through the development of the Americas, so the centre of *Weltpolitik* is being shifted to the Pacific. I believe that it is to the countries bordering the Pacific that the world will look for a lead in introducing the 'Brave New World' which must follow the chaos wrought in the Old World.

The fact that the shores of some of the world's most highly developed and industrialized countries, the United States of America, Soviet Russia, Australia, Japan—and we can soon add China and the Dutch East Indies—are washed by the Pacific, justifies a belief in its future. The intensive development of colonies and dominions, is leading to a new independence, and growth of local cultures. The Pacific represents the New World and new ideas. In a few centuries it has outstripped the Old World and given birth to a new race of man and a new technique of life.

The United States, Australia, New Zealand and New Caledonia belong to this New World, and they have much in common. Their pioneers counted among their numbers, men and women who had either rejected the Old World because of its religious or political intolerance and bigotry or had been ejected by it, because of their too intense zeal to change it into a world nearer their heart's desire.

When France expelled its Communards and sent them bound in chains to languish in the convict prisons of New Caledonia, when England's Irish Nationalists and Chartists despaired of reforming the Old World and set out to build something new in the dominions and the United States where no preconceived ideas of privilege and tradition existed, when the Pilgrim Fathers set out in the *Mayflower* for America, a movement was started which was to lay the foundation of the New World.

Those who fought in the American War of Independence, those who fought at the barricades at Eureka Stockade to defend the rights of Australian citizens, those who armed themselves with guns and iron railings and stormed into the Noumean streets in September, 1940, to chase out of

office—and out of the colony—those who had betrayed their interests and honour, all belong to the same tradition of the New World. It is a tradition of sturdy independence and jealous vigilance where a violation of basic rights is concerned.

It was no accident that the first demand raised by democrats in New Caledonia after the downfall of France, was for the immediate establishment of direct relations between the colony and Australia, and the United States. For the first time in New Caledonian history, both of those countries now are officially represented in the capital. Whatever the outcome of the present war, whatever the fate of the French Empire, it is certain that relations between New Caledonia and its Pacific neighbours will become ever closer, and it's high time that all we Pacific neighbours began to know each other a little better.



## LAND NORTH OF SYDNEY

THERE had been many difficulties in arranging a passage to New Caledonia in war-time. Ten days I had been waiting in Sydney, and each day, the shipping company said: 'No news of a sailing yet.' Then, one day, the message arrived that I must present myself on board the *Flying Fox*, a French boat, at 4 o'clock that same afternoon.

The 200-ton *Flying Fox*, lying in Circular Quay, was a boat to strike terror into the heart of any traveller with as sensitive a stomach as mine. Dirty and low, with her hatches about three feet above the water, she looked vicious and spiteful. The only deck cabin—which had originally been reserved for me—was unfortunately passed over to two girls, intent on exploring the unusual by way of a holiday. Filled with forebodings of sea-sickness, while we were still tied up to Sydney Quay, I was led by divers murky passages, down greasy 'escaliers' to my headquarters for the voyage—a dingy, four-berth cabin, amidships.

Our departure at least was a triumph. The harbour was calm and blue. A group of native sailors gathered on the aft deck and sang the plaintive, yearning songs that are sung by islanders in the South Seas whenever a boat puts to sea. While we anchored out in the harbour and took on a cargo of explosives for the New Caledonian mines, dinner was served, and for me the voyage was still a success. We slipped out across the harbour, passed some grim, grey-painted mine-sweepers trawling near Sydney Heads—and headed north-east.

It was not the first time I had made the trip from Sydney to Noumea. On two previous occasions I had travelled on the *Pierre Loti*, which I had fondly imagined to be the worst ship afloat. The *Pierre Loti*—which had a romantic history as the Black Sea yacht of Tsar Nicholas of Russia, and was



later seized by the French Fleet during their interventionary campaign in the Black Sea, following the Bolshevik revolution—was of 2,000 tons, and as she took four days to cover the 1,000 odd miles between Sydney and Noumea, it seemed to me that she was slow enough. Apart from that, her second class dining saloon was directly over the propellers, and as these dipped in and out of the water most of the time while meals were being served, the vibration ruined the appetite of even hardy sea-seasoned globe-trotters.

The *Pierre Loti* was a luxury liner compared to the *Flying Fox*. Within a few minutes of leaving Sydney Heads, green rollers were hurtling across our decks, rushing out through the scuppers with a stomach-shaking sucking noise. I was the first by three minutes to succumb to sea-sickness, and before night fell, I was comfortably ensconced in my cabin. Travelling in war-time is a gloomy thing at best—no lights in the corridors, no portholes open, and electric light globes coloured deep Reckitt's blue, which make one's fellow cabin mates appear even more ghastly in their sea-sickness than they really are.

On the third day out, the boat seemed to be thrown around even more recklessly than before. The water in my water flask ran to more absurd angles than ever, and the thudding and slapping at the ship's sides became still more pronounced. That evening the mate on his nightly rounds to ensure that no lights were showing, had an unusually wry look about his lips. In answer to my query, he said: 'Ze skipper, e's very worry. Ze glass, she's fall right below 'urricane, but there's no sign of any win' yet. Somesing funny about zat.'

The wind came that night, and rain sizzled and battered against the portholes, while the *Flying Fox* heaved and struggled and sounded like a hooked swordfish. That's the first time I was really thankful for being so easily made seasick. Sea-sickness is so delightfully absolute. Mine, commenced outside Sydney Heads, couldn't become worse, and as long as I kept to my bunk I was relatively comfortable. Not so the hardier spirits, who had been able to stay on deck

until now. The hurricane finished them and like deflated balloons, they were helped down to cabins and bunks to endure mortification of flesh and spirit.

It was difficult to obtain any information as to a possible date of arrival. My Javanese cabin boy, Salom, who incidentally had two wives waiting for him in Noumea—and I suspected a few more in Java—was rather vague when it came to discussing matters of time. Our conversation usually ran as follows :

Myself : Alors, Salom, Quand est-ce qu'on va arriver à Noumea ? (When will we be at Noumea ?)

Peut-être arriver demain—ou Mardi. (Maybe arrive to-morrow or Tuesday).

Mai, aujourd'hui c'est Mardi ! (But it's Tuesday to-day !)

Salom, surprised, then hopefully : Ah oui ? Peut-être arriver demain. (Oh yes ? Maybe arrive to-morrow).

It would need a psycho-analyst to decide why Tuesday should be the only alternative arrival date to 'to-morrow' in Salom's mind. After six days of tossing and heaving, the clothes hanging on the cabin door began to be more confined in their movements, and the noises outside the porthole began to subside. Peering out through the blue-painted porthole there was a sight of land at last, although it wasn't yet Tuesday. When Salom came into the cabin, my hopes were shattered, however, when he announced that we were still off the coast of Australia. It appeared that one of our two engines had broken down, and during the hurricane we had scarcely made any progress.

A couple of days later we ran out of provisions, and had to fall back on eating our cargo. Fortunately we had plenty of tinned food and butter for the butter-rationed New Caledonian population, and for the remainder of the voyage we were fed from the hold. Another emergency arose when the bunkers were discovered to be empty of coal, but here again we were lucky, and after most of the cargo had been shifted, a reserve stock of coal was uncovered, and sweating Melanesian natives, in an unending procession, carried the baskets of coal from hold to bunkers.

On the night of the tenth day, Salom burst into my cabin, his thin, bronzed face crinkled into smiles. 'Arriver demain ! Bien sur !' he said, this time without any qualifications or provisos.

Sure enough, early next morning, the Pacific Ocean, having had its will of the *Flying Fox*, rolled her through a foaming narrow pass into the calm, reef-guarded waters of New Caledonia. From then on the voyage was a pleasure for me, and I was able to emerge from the darkness of my cabin, to share with the hardier passengers the joys of approaching Noumea. With the magnificent exception of Tahiti, I know of no other Pacific island which presents such a majestic impression on arrival as does New Caledonia. The intense purple of the undulating line of mountains, the snowy whiteness of the layers of compressed cotton wool clouds which hang low over them, the vivid green of the coral-bottomed waters, combine to present a dramatic colour-pattern which belongs exclusively to New Caledonia.

Within a few minutes of passing through the reef, the burly pilot was aboard, and giving out the latest war news—for during our ten days' Odyssey we were not allowed to use ship's wireless—and the whole ship's company was news-starved. As we neared Noumea, a smart silvery grey ship sped past on its way out of harbour.

'He's one of de Jap boats, on his way to get iron,' explained the pilot.

'Are there many Jap boats arriving these days?' I inquired.

'Oh, la la ! Three last week. And look at him. She's a fast boat, too. He was in trouble that one though.'

'What do you mean he was in trouble ?'

'Well, you see, when a boat comes here—any boat at all, we put a seal on his radio. And this one, he comes in three days ago, and we put a seal of three copper wires round his transmitter. The day he was to leave, I go aboard, and see only two wires, and joined underneath. 'E thought we wouldn't notice that, but I report it. The radio operator, 'e got fined and 'e's not allowed to come back to Caledonia again.'

By this time, we were within a few kilometres of Noumea, and a few canoes rigged with white sails came out to escort us in. There was great excitement and shouting between the natives in the canoes and those of our crew. It appeared that we were long given up as lost in Noumea. Everybody was certain that the 'corsair' (raider) had got us, as it had our predecessor the *Notou*. When we finally pulled in alongside the Noumea wharf, I had the terrible feeling however that the people there were not nearly as worried about our fate as they were about whether or not we had brought potatoes—and wine—to replenish the island's supplies. We had.

At first it seemed that there was some doubt as to whether we passengers could land. It appeared that between the time of our departure from Australia and our arrival at Noumea, a new regulation had been introduced that visitors to New Caledonia must have visas. After much discussion and production of letters from the Free French representatives in Australia assuring us that no visas were required, the situation was overcome by the police officer issuing us with visas on the spot for a modest fee, and by the time we stepped ashore the law's requirements had been fulfilled.

Customs regulations are reduced to the minimum at New Caledonia. Even articles such as cameras and typewriters, which in most countries cause an expression of savage joy to steal across customs officers' faces, in New Caledonia are hardly glanced at, and one has a sense of being welcomed, even by the customs officials.

On each of three visits to New Caledonia, my reactions on arrival have been the same. Why don't we in Australia know more about the place? Right at our front door, we have the opportunity of imbibing another atmosphere, studying another culture, and practising another language that most of us are taught at school; yet only a handful of people seem to have heard of the colony, and a still smaller number ever to have visited it.

Added to the delights of living French, eating and drinking French, hearing and speaking French, is the attraction that

in New Caledonia all these things can be enjoyed in the most perfect South Sea background, with a scenery rivalling that of the Riviera, a climate more temperate than that of Provence, and a variety of population proportionately higher than in Paris.

Apart from the sweating Melanesian 'boys'—I have never yet discovered when natives grow to be men ; no matter what their age or rank they are never referred to as anything else but 'boys'—who swarmed over the boat on arrival, craving the right to earn a few francs by carrying the passengers' baggage ashore, there was a most varied collection of nationalities on the wharf to watch the boat come in. There were comparatively few French, but numerous Japanese merchants sleek and prosperous looking, in gleaming white duck. There was a handful of beautiful, petite, Javanese women with sarongs swathed round their waists ; and, slung in a sarong round their necks, babies that looked painfully large for such infinitely slender mothers. There were a few perfectly built, round-faced Chinese women and mouthfuls of teeth as black as night, from chewing the betel-nut ; clad in black silk slacks and smart little coatees. The white people looked unduly white and anæmic in comparison with the bronze and dark brown of the rest of the crowd ; and weak and punny compared to the muscular natives.

These latter were hard at work from the moment the gang plank was laid from boat to shore. As soon as we had negotiated the passage through the reef—18 kilometres from Noumea—the 'boys' on board had cleared the hatches away, and were piling the cargo from the hold on to the decks. Within a few hours of the *Flying Fox* touching the quay, the whole of the cargo had been removed by hand to the customs shed.

Both day seems gala day to the 'boys'—who by the way are not New Caledonians, but Loyalty Islanders, from a little group of islands a few miles south-east of New Caledonia and under New Caledonian jurisdiction. With strips of red and white cloth clinging in some mysterious way to their loins, strands of coloured wool hanging round their

shoulders, their normal black hair lime-bleached to a thick, sickly yellow, they work like madmen. The whole business of discharging of the cargo is done at the double, to the accompaniment of booming shouts and gusts of laughter when some hitch occurs.

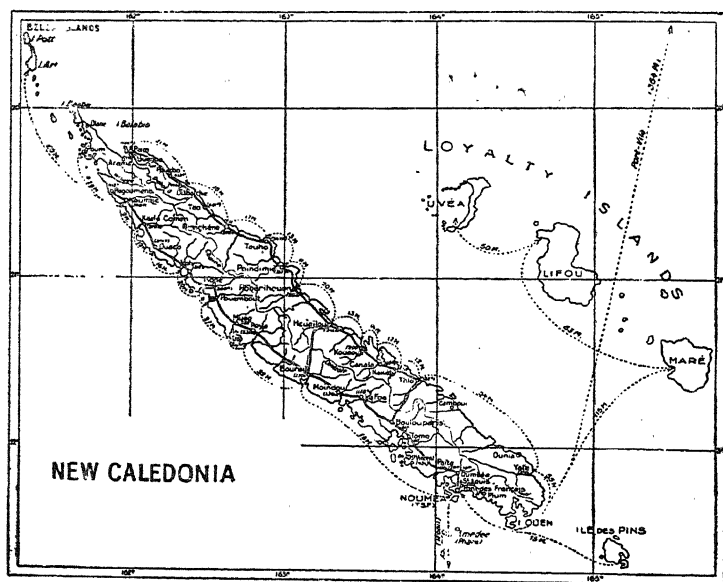
In New Caledonia human labour seems cheaper than machinery. Even the coaling of the *Flying Fox* was carried out by a bucket—or rather basket-brigade—of natives who formed a human chain passing along wicker baskets of coal, from link to link, until the pile of coal on the wharf was transferred to the ship's bunkers. At first one has the impression that the 'boys' love this work, because of the interminable grin on their faces, but after watching them for some time, this grin appears more like the leer on the mouth of a punch-tired boxer, than a smile of happy contentment.

It appears that these 'boys' have some notions as to what are, and what are not their rights. During my first visit to the island in 1937, our boat was held up for seven days, during which time the natives held a successful strike for better conditions. The strike, although commenced by the natives, was clinched in their favour only when the French crew of the boat in question not only refused to discharge the cargo themselves, but refused to take the boat out of the harbour until the natives' demands for better conditions were complied with.

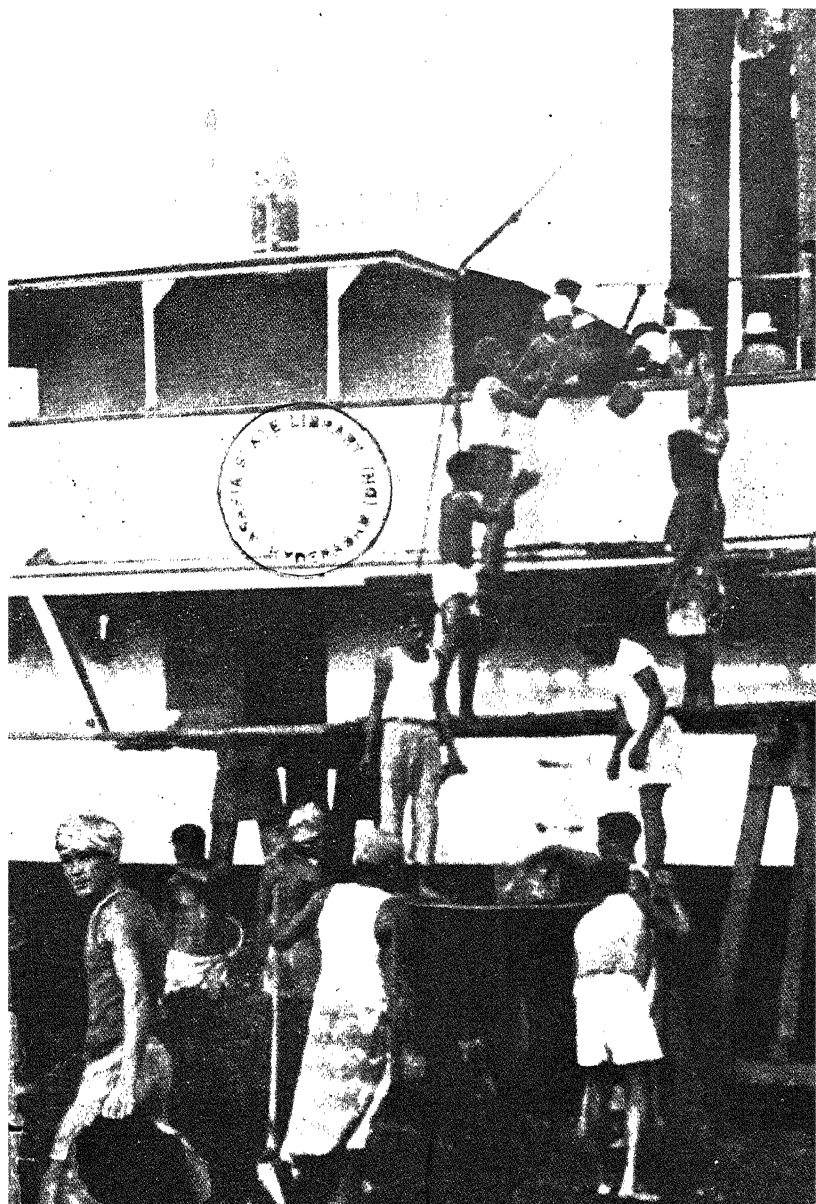
By the time the immigration, police and customs requirements were fulfilled, it was already lunch time—and immediately I realized that the 800 miles of ocean which separated Australia from New Caledonia was a buffer separating two completely different sets of customs. One learns in New Caledonia of the joys of the 'heure de la sieste.' From 11 a.m. to 1-30 p.m., the whole colony goes dead. Houses and shops are closed, barred and shuttered in a most inhospitable-seeming fashion. As I strolled along in search of a hotel, under the midday sun, there was scarcely a person in the streets. Even in the splendid central park, the 'Place des Cocotiers,' the only humans were taxi-drivers, their caps pulled over their eyes, asleep in the front seat of their taxis,

and bearded ancients whom I later discovered to be old convicts, stretched out on the park seats, enjoying the luxury of a couple of hours' nap with the warmth of the sun for covering. In New Caledonia 'L'heure de la sieste' is a serious institution, and from 11 a.m. until the businesses open again at 1-30 p.m. a few stray dogs and cats have the streets to themselves.

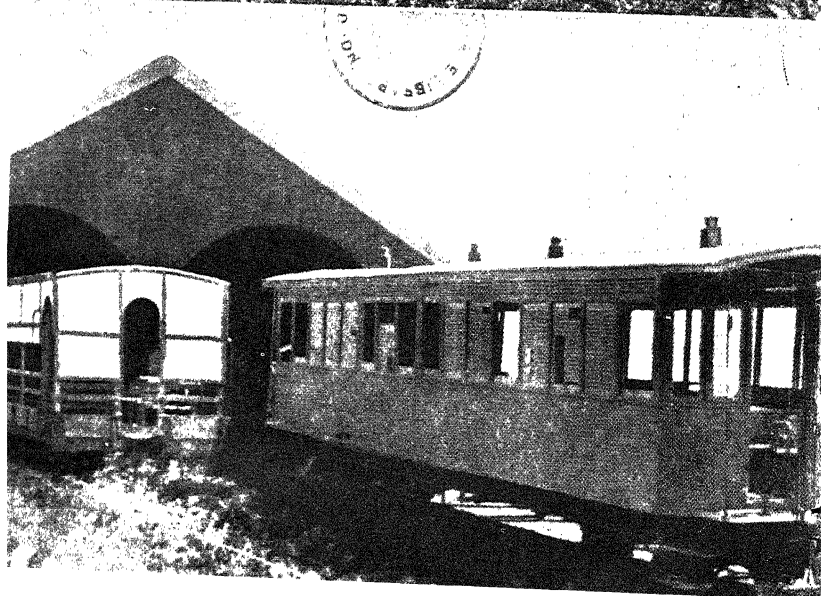
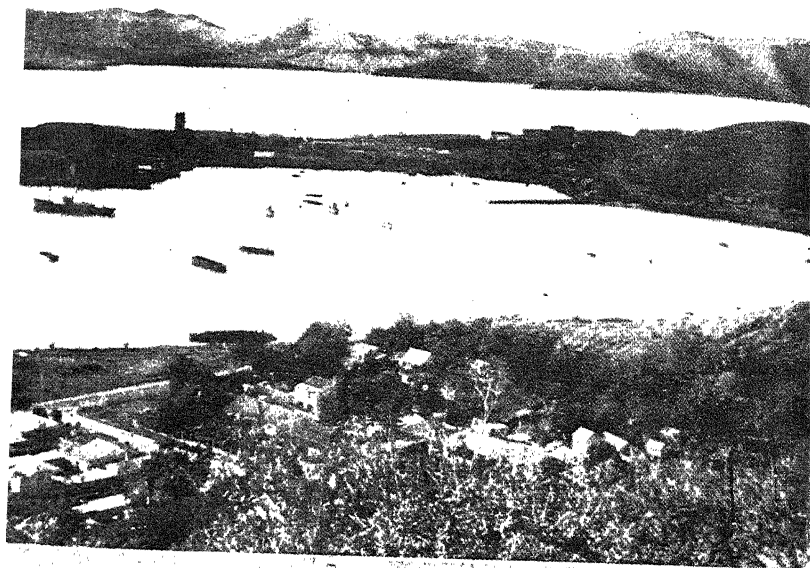
Knowing better than to disturb the peace and quiet of hotel-proprietors during Noumea's sacred hour, I joined the convicts in the park. Curled up on a park bench with the rustling of dry coconut palm fronds in my ears, and the smell of coffee in my nostrils, I paid tribute to the votaries of the siesta,



*Facing:* Labour's cheaper than machines. The ship is being loaded with coal by a basket brigade.







## AN ENGLISHMAN DISCOVERS, A FRENCHMAN ANNEXES

WHEN Captain Cook with his two ships *Resolution* and *Adventure* first sighted New Caledonia on September 4th, 1774—four years after he discovered the East Coast of Australia—the apparent poverty of the country, as much as the beautiful soft, purple and blue of its rugged mountains reminded him of Scotland, and he named the land New Caledonia—New Scotland. After anchoring at a small island off the East Coast for several days, he gingerly felt his way through a boiling pass in the treacherous reef and anchored in Balade Bay—in the extreme north-east corner of the island. After Cook had stayed so long among the gentle Polynesians in their enchanting islands of Oceania—especially at Tahiti—New Caledonia seemed a poor and uninteresting substitute, and Cook never thought it worth while to stay very long—or even to explore the interior of the island.

Cook and his men, accompanied by the naturalist George Forster, disembarked at Balade and soon established contact with the inhabitants, who had come out to the boats, and shown friendly intentions. Apparently, with his famous tact in dealing with natives, Cook was well received and was soon on excellent terms with the tribesmen, and exchanges of feasts took place.

On September 13th, after Cook had left the islanders a few pigs, whose progeny might one day supply fresh food for meat-hungry mariners, the *Resolution* and *Adventure* sailed out of Balade Bay again, and turning southward continued their voyage of discovery.

For 20 years the island was not visited, and then in 1793, the French navigator, D'Entrecasteaux, also sailed into the Bay of Balade. D'Entrecasteaux stayed longer and made a more thorough investigation of the island than did Cook,

*Facing Above :* The Nickel Company's works at Noumea.

*Below :* One of the few South Sea railways—but it doesn't function.

and when he returned to France, he took back with him a favourable report on 'La Nouvelle Calédonie.'

Serious preparation for the annexation of the island was as usual preceded by the dispatch of missionaries, and the story of these latter in New Caledonia is a story of perfect co-operation of the cross and the sword in furthering Imperial policy.

In 1843, Admiral de Petit-Thouars, Commander of the French forces in the Pacific, stationed at the Marquesas Islands, ordered the galley *Bucéphale* to take Monsignor Touarre, Bishop of Amata, the Peres Rougeyron and Viard, and two lay brothers, and land them at New Caledonia. The Bishop of Amata was from Auvergne—'a man of excessive gentleness, boundless modesty and indomitable courage.' ('Les Missionnaires de France dans la Pacifique.' Leon Fauvrat, 1895). Before he left France, the bishop had seen the King Emperor, who—thinking no doubt only of the thousands of heathen savages to be brought into the Christian fold, and not dreaming of adding another island to his Empire—blessed the enterprise and offered the missionaries free passage on a French vessel, and protection until the mission was established on the island.

'You will give,' wrote Admiral de Petit-Thouars to de la Ferriere, the Captain of the *Bucéphale*, 'all possible help to Monsigneur to facilitate his mission in the midst of the natives.... Should your success with the chiefs be great enough to lead them to recognition of the sovereignty of the government of his Majesty the King of France, you will not neglect to do so, nor to draw up a document embodying this recognition, signed by you and the other missionaries. Only in the case that the terms of the submission should be explicit, shall you authorize the missionaries to hoist the French flag.'

At least one can admire the admirable frankness of all parties in admitting to each other one of the purposes of the visit. After a seven and a half months' voyage, the *Bucéphale* dropped anchor in the Bay of Balade on December 19th, 1843. Contact was established between the Captain of the boat and the Grand Chief of Balade, who gave the missionaries a grant of land in exchange for a few axes and

beads. The chief was very friendly and allowed the sailors to cut the necessary timber from his domains to build the mission house. In less than a month the mission was established, their house built, and the *Bucéphale* was ready to sail again. Captain de la Ferriere invited the missionaries, various petty chiefs and the Grand Chief of Balade—promoted by whites to the status of King Pakili Poumai of Balade—to a farewell dinner on board the *Bucéphale*. The Captain was anxious to see how far he had progressed in the way of empire-winning.

Results were even better than he expected. The King of Balade—no doubt for the price of a few extra axes—made a long speech reminding his fellow-islanders that the French were good people. Didn't they have steel tomahawks and glass beads? Everybody should help and respect the whites that were coming to live amongst them.

The Captain was pleased, and profited by the genial atmosphere of the dinner to let the chiefs know that France had established sovereignty over the island. Later in the day a French flag was hoisted over the mission station, and after firing a solemn salute of 21 guns to impress the assembled chiefs, the *Bucéphale* sailed away, leaving the Bishop d'Amata, the priests Viard and Rougeyron and two lay brothers to commence their labours among the heathen Melanesians.

The natives no doubt hadn't the slightest notion why the whites had arrived on the island, but, as they had arrived they accepted them. They showed them how to cultivate the ignames and taro, loosening the soil in the rainy season with long pointed sticks, and planting the tuber deep under ground. They showed them how to make irrigation terraces, water channels from split bamboo pipes, and also how to make trailing frames for the vines. When there was a great drought, a few months after the *Bucéphale* left, Grand Chief Bouarate in the neighbouring district of Hienghene even gave the missionaries a great field of ignames, which saved them from starvation.

Until their own cultivation fields began to yield the missionaries bought their food from the natives, paying for

it with trifles they had brought expressly for that purpose. When they exhausted their supplies of red cloth, glass beads and axes, however, it made no difference to the natives. They continued to supply them with food just the same.

As long as the missionaries lived quietly, cultivating their fields, and praying among themselves, it seemed that their relations with the natives were excellent. Once the missionaries felt themselves firmly established, however, they began to ask for more and more concessions. Pere Rougeyron reveals in letters written in 1845 that he and his fellow missionaries were anxious to obtain as much land as possible, and this could only be accomplished by reducing the natives' cultivation area. Worse still, the missionaries began to violate the most sacred taboos of the tribesmen and to pour contempt on their complex moral institutions.

Everything which the natives had been used to was now declared sinful, and punishable. At first they tried to understand and adapt themselves to these new concepts, but this led to a greater confusion than ever. Pere Rougeyron tells the story of one Michel, who came to the Marist Fathers to be baptized. As Michel was a wealthy native he had two wives, and the pères gently told him that he couldn't be baptized on this account. The following day Michel returned and again asked to be baptized. The pères again sorrowfully shook their heads, and said: 'No, Michel. No Christian can have two wives!' Whereupon a gleam of joy entered Michel's eyes as he announced: 'But only one wife now. Killed other one.' One wonders whether the pious fathers had any feeling of responsibility for Michel's crime—a necessary crime as far as Michel was concerned if he was to be made a Christian.

The missionaries as a rule were careful not to baptize natives until they were on their death beds. They were frightened that if they baptized them earlier, the natives might slip back into the heathen ways and die bad Christians. The natives, seeing that every person baptized died shortly afterwards, naturally believed the missionaries had put some spell on them to kill them. The missionaries came to be

regarded as 'T'katas' (sorcerers), and as any sorcerers outside those recognized by the tribe were killed, there began a movement to wipe out the missionaries.

Even Bouarate, who had given them large tracts of land, inviting them to settle in his district of Hienghene, turned against them. The more land Bouarate gave them the more the missionaries wanted, until he finally expelled them from his territory, calling them sorcerers and exploiters.

When another boat bringing missionary reinforcements arrived in Balade in 1847, the original mission station was found to be in ruins, and the place deserted. Those of the missionaries who were still alive were located at Pouébo, a coastal village to the south, whither they fled after narrowly escaping extermination when the natives attacked their station at Balade. The maltreatment of missionaries was made the moral reason, inside France, for an agitation to have the island taken under French protection, and the missionaries were given the support of French muskets in their work of Christianization.

Annexation of the island had long been considered for totally different reasons. Lieutenant Biseuil in his *Notices Historiques et Anecdotiques sur La Nouvelle Calédonie 1774-1878*, maintains that ever since D'Entrecasteaux visited the island France had her eye on it for the deportation of convicts—to make it a 'Sydney of the South Seas.' On the other hand, France wanted it as a mercantile and naval base in the Pacific, made necessary by the growth of trade between Australia and America with France. For a long time the French hesitated to take action which might bring them into open conflict with the British, at whose insistence the French flag at the Mission Station had been taken down; but in early 1853, as they heard by indirect means that the British had decided to annex the island, they decided to get in first.

Savoie maintains that early in 1853 a French naval officer learned through the indiscretion of a British naval officer at a ball in Sydney that the commander of an English naval squadron had received orders to annex the island, but as he knew there were no French warships in the vicinity he was

not in a hurry to leave the easy pleasures of Sydney. The French naval officers passed his interesting information on to the French authorities.

As at that time France and Britain were fighting together against Russia, Napoleon believed that Britain would not risk breaking the alliance even if France did steal a march in seizing New Caledonia. On April 29th, 1853, orders were forwarded to the commander of the naval division at Réunion and Indo-China to despatch the frigate *Constantine* to take New Caledonia. Because of the uncertainties of communications in those days, a duplicate set of instructions was also forwarded to Admiral Febvrier Despointes in charge of the Pacific squadron.

The instructions, which carried a special note from the Emperor himself, were, to proceed to New Caledonia, to hoist the French flag on two prominent parts of the island in a permanent fashion and to establish two fortified posts strong enough to resist any possible attacks by the natives. Should, however, other Powers already have occupied the island, the admirals were ordered to return to their bases, avoiding at all costs any hostile action. The admirals were furthermore enjoined to maintain strict secrecy about their movements.

Some idea of the advance in communications during the past 90 years is seen by the fact that Febvrier Despointes received his orders at Callao on July 15th, while Montravel received his at Macao on October 19th, six months after they were despatched from France.

Febvrier Despointes set sail immediately on receiving his orders, covering his tracks by announcing that he was proceeding on a routine visit to Tahiti. Not until he had actually left Tahiti on the last section of his voyage to New Caledonia did he reveal the purpose of the voyage even to his officers and crew.

To allay any suspicions at Tahiti, he took on only a few provisions, but secretly arranged for another French boat in Papeete harbour to establish a stock of food on a neighbouring island, where Febvrier Despointes later collected them,

and transferred to the *Phoque*, a faster and larger vessel. Lieutenant Biseuil records that when the Admiral revealed to officers and crew the purpose of the voyage, the 'boat shook with enthusiastic cries of "Vive l'Empereur!"'

Admiral Febvrier Despointes writes: 'In the morning of September 23rd, I perceived the heights of Hienghene, our first sight of New Caledonia. I only passed by this place, and went up inside the reef to Pouébo, where I knew I would meet the Fathers of the French Mission. I set anchor there that same evening and learned from Pere Rougeyron of the death of d'Amata.

'Following my instructions I assured myself that no warship had visited these shores for a long time, and accordingly, although there was a French settlement at Pouébo, I proceeded on September 24th to the harbour at Balade, 8 miles away, where I dropped anchor the same day. This was a most important site, since it had a considerable settlement and because it was here that the natives had come most markedly under the benevolent influence of our missionaries. Having been informed that the *Constantine* and the *Catinet* (Montravel's boats) had not arrived, and convinced that no foreign flag waved on the island, I decided to take possession of New Caledonia immediately on behalf of and in the name of His Majesty the Emperor. Therefore, I disembarked, and accompanied by my état-major and an armed detachment, I ordered that the French flag be hoisted. This was saluted with 21 cannon shots in the presence of the Fathers of the Mission and of the main native chiefs of the district...'

At least the first half of the Admiral's instructions had been carried out and it remained only to find a convenient place where the second flag could be hoisted without interference, and the island would be secured for France.

The French missionaries advised the Admiral to go to Ile des Pins, an isolated island off the extreme south of New Caledonia. Another mission station had been established there, and according to the missionaries the natives were peaceably inclined—and still more important, the chief was



an intelligent man, who had been won over to French interests.

Leaving behind an armed detachment to guard the flag at Balade, Febvrier Despointes set sail on September 26th and arrived a couple of days later at Ile des Pins. Horror of horrors! There was an English warship anchored in the harbour. One can imagine the Admiral's feelings. No doubt, he began to think of the days he had wasted at Balade, and the missionary settlement at Pouébo, when he should have hastened to plant the second flag. What discomfiture for a gallant admiral! It was too late to turn back out of the harbour. He must go ahead and at least greet the English officers. To his surprise, when he dropped anchor alongside the British warship, he could see no Union Jack waving from the island.

The English commander soon set out to pay a courtesy call, and Febvrier Despointes tactfully pumped him to see how much he knew, and how much he had already accomplished. Captain Denham explained that he had come with the *Herald* to map out the coast and then return to Sydney. Despite the innocent explanation, Febvrier Despointes wasn't altogether convinced. Only one thing was certain. The English hadn't yet seized the island. The French admiral thought he noticed some annoyance and impatience in the manner of the English officer, and determined to find the reason. Later in the evening, he paid a return visit to the English boat; he saw laid out on the captain's table axes, cotton prints and glass beads that form the normal currency with white men when they want to bargain with native chiefs.

Febvrier Despointes decided that if he was to win the island he must act, and act quickly. He explained the position to his officers and crew, stressing that no preparations must be made that would attract the attention of the English. Late at night, he sent his chief officer ashore in a whaleboat to contact the French missionaries, and ask them to prepare everything for a disembarkation the following morning.

Once contact had been established the fathers were

instructed to approach the friendly chief and get him to persuade the people to place themselves under French protection. No doubt the chief was already well primed as to the terrible consequences if Englishmen shou'd happen to seize their island. In addition the missionaries were asked to erect during the night a flag pole, ready to take the French flag.

Heavy rain all that night completely screened the movements of the missionaries on shore, and even the passage of the whaleboat to and from the *Phoque*. At midnight the officer returned and told the Admiral that everything was in readiness. The Fathers were only too pleased to co-operate and the Grand Chief, Ven-dé-Gou, had been prepared by them for a long time for just such eventuality as had now occurred.

'Nobody on board the *Phoque* slept that night,' writes Biseuil, 'the emotion, the impatience to conclude the annexation, the satisfaction at playing a good trick on the English Captain, kept everybody awake.' Before day-break the boats were away, and a few minutes later the French flag was flying over Ile des Pins, with the chief officers and crew of the boat, the missionaries, the Grand Chief Ven-dé-Gou and a great crowd of natives, as witnesses. At 8 a.m. Captain Denham and the English sailors were startled by a salute of 21 cannon shots, which announced that New Caledonia was French territory.

Captain Denham, as may be imagined, was in a desperate state. He had dallied away his time in Sydney, and even later in the Ile des Pins. If he had even acted as soon as the French boat arrived, he would still have been in time. According to Biseuil he was in a very angry state, and tried to persuade the chief to renounce his support of the French, and when this failed, he attempted to foment a revolt of the natives, telling them that their chief had sold their independence for a few axes. All these attempts were vain, however, and Denham returned to Sydney, frustrated and ill. His own sense of humiliation, and probably a sharp note from the British Admiralty, weighed heavily on his mind,

and not long after his arrival back in Australia, Captain Denham committed suicide.

There is no doubt that if either Britain or France had known of the riches which lay hidden beneath those barren-looking blue mountains they would not have been content to settle ownership by a mere flag-hoisting race. They couldn't know that the valleys were filled with iron and manganese, and the mountains with nickel, chrome, copper and antimony, and other ores not even classified in the days of Febvrier Despointes and Captain Denham. It was just an island, and as England had plenty of other territory in this part of the world, she wasn't particularly troubled that France should have grabbed this prize from under her nose. In any case the two countries were still allies, and Russia had to be dealt with before they could start quarrelling over a bit of an island like New Caledonia.

For his part in the occupation of the island, the French Government gave Grand Chief Ven-dé-Gou a pension of 125 francs a month, and the missionaries were granted further valuable tracts of land on the mainland. Meanwhile, the first real colonist of the island—old John Paddon—had already been established at Ile Nou—opposite Noumea—for eight years before the events just related transpired, and not greatly worrying whether French or English owned the island, as long as they didn't interfere with his trading station.

During the early years, New Caledonia seems to have been run almost entirely by the Marist missionaries, who rapidly increased the power and wealth of their stations, to the Glory of God, and the profit of the church. They didn't have a particularly easy time of it, and many of them were massacred and eaten before the natives were finally pacified. The hostility which the natives showed towards the Marists, is all the more surprising considering the friendly attitude they had adopted towards the earlier white visitors to the island. Some writers even suggest that the missionaries were the chief causes of the many revolts during the first fifty years of the French occupation.

Amouroux and Place, in their work *L'Administration et Les Maristes en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, have some pertinent comment on the role played by the missionaries—and as the authors were among the early colonists of the island, their remarks can't be disregarded. 'The missionaries,' they write, 'not thinking that their tasks should be carried out in peace and by civilized methods, sowed dissension, meanwhile obtaining the best parts of the island from pious administrators, who robbed the natives shamelessly. The Marists without any authorization, but at the same time supported by the administration, energetically enlisted their converts for their profits, traded with them, and made use of their labour, until Bouarate, chief of Hienghène (early mission centre) revolted, crying out in protest: 'We don't want these t'katas (sorcerers) any more. The gown of a priest, thinly disguises the exploiter under the name of brother-worker, the spy under the name of catechist!'

These two writers further charge the Marists with having deliberately fostered revolts, so that the administration would be given the opportunity of annexing more and more of the natives' land, driving them back farther and farther in to the mountains. They refer to a Lieutenant Boucher, who showed a strong sense of justice and the rights of the natives, showing them the power of French authority, but without shedding a drop of blood or burning a native hut. 'He had likewise protested against the monopoliser of the soil, who too often drove the natives to revolt in order to get their land. The missionaries, however, have not hesitated to get his recall, and have done everything possible to prevent his return... The Marists have contributed much to the natural antagonism between the black and white races—more, they have fostered hatred between black and white.'

How much of this criticism is justified is hard to decide to-day, but two salient facts are that the mission stations *do* own more than 100,000 acres of the best land in the colony to-day, and it *was* in the mission centres that most of the revolts started.

According to Amouroux and Place, however, the

administration wasn't as interested in finding the causes of the revolts, as were the colonists themselves. They claim that the administration was secretly rather pleased at the revolts, which as long as they were confined to respectable limits, had a beneficial effect as far as colonization was concerned. 'Whilst the troops pursued the rebels, demands for concessions of the insurgents' territory were already being filed at the Office of the Interior. When the Government was asked—in disgust—why this should be, the excuse was made that the English and Americans did the same in Australia, India and the United States.'

This claim seems borne out by M. Jules Garnier, who was sent out to New Caledonia in 1863 to make a survey of the natural wealth of the colony and the possibilities for its exploitation. Garnier writes quite openly that while the revolt is being quelled, the natives take to the mountains to escape, and their land is immediately seized. Later, when the chiefs lead their people back again and receive a governmental pardon, their land still remains confiscated.

Garnier writes: 'Therefore from certain viewpoints, strangely enough, it is fortunate that the natives do get up to mischief from time to time, for their confiscated land increases the public wealth and helps the colonists. Without that one would be obliged to act with more brutality—and let's admit it openly—more candour, in driving them back into the mountains.'

From finding it a 'fortunate chance' that the natives revolt, to doing something toward bringing about the 'fortunate chance' was probably not a very big step, and it is likely that all the minor revolts were deliberately engineered by 'agents provocateurs.' Garnier, who, by the way, was the first to discover the presence of minerals on the island, seems to find any means justifiable which secured the colony for the whites. 'We have seen that this colony could support two millions whites, whilst the native population amounts to hardly 30,000. (Actually most estimates of the native population at that time were 60,000 to 70,000, and a census taken in 1887 after many had been killed in fighting,

showed 41,000). Isn't it just, that they should cede their place to those who by patient and active study, during numerous centuries, were able to apply science to resources which permitted them to attain the marvellous result of drawing from the soil fifty times as much as could the savage? Isn't it a law sanctioned each moment in nature by a thousand examples that the skilled person replaces the unskilled, the strong the weak?'

Garnier would probably be amazed and disappointed to learn that eighty years after he visited the island there are probably less white people there than when he was there. His estimate of a white population of 2,000,000 seems very optimistic compared with the actual number of 15,000 whites that occupy the island to-day—only half of the present black population.

Actually the revolts had the opposite of a beneficial effect on the colony, and are one of the chief reasons for the present low white population. News of clashes with the natives was suppressed in the beginning, and even people in Noumea knew nothing of revolts occurring in other parts of the island. There was only one newspaper in the colony, and it had orders not to publish anything of the revolts in case colonists became discouraged. Every attempt was made—including the use of Garnier's report on his return to France—to encourage immigrants to the colony, and the natives were presented as people who 'got up to pranks now and again,' but were no serious menace.

Amouroux and Place record that several hundreds of would-be colonists emigrated after reading Garnier's optimistic report, and found nothing but ruins and death. After news of the real situation leaked out, it was difficult to persuade people from France to migrate. At first the revolts were isolated affairs, occurring in one district at a time, usually where some expropriation of the natives' land occurred, but in 1878, something happened which could not be hushed up—a revolt on such a large scale and so well organized that the French were within an ace of being turned out of the island.

## MAGIC VOYAGE UP NORTH

INVITED by one of the oldest native-born residents to accompany him on a trip to the extreme north of the island to visit a chrome concession, I was quick to accept. Petrol rationing had been introduced a few weeks before our trip was to commence, but M. Sautot, the Governor of the Colony, graciously granted my host an extra ration of petrol for our 500-mile inland journey. M. Calimbre, my guide, chauffeur and mentor during the trip, was born on the Ile des Pins, south of New Caledonia. His father was a purveyor of provisions to the settlement of political deportees established on Ile des Pins, after the 1871 Paris Commune revolution, and except for a few years' business training in Sydney, M. Calimbre had spent all his life in the colony.

We left Noumea at 5 o'clock one morning, with a cool fragrant night breeze blowing in our faces. Already carts laden with produce from the Javanese market gardens were rumbling along the road, towards the open-air market place. Now and again a sleepy-eyed Javanese or Tonkinese woman would come into the glare of the car lights, sauntering along, string bags in hand, to get the pick of the morning's produce.

On our right, the first light of day revealed lofty mountains like immense buildings built by a crazy architect, with solid walls twisting into knife-like ridges which tilted down towards the plains splitting up into scrub-covered hips and gables. At first glance they seemed forbidding—all hard and keen-edged lines—but as the light grew more intense, valleys and dimpled hollows were filled with greyish mauve shadows, and their contours were softened with ragged streaks of white mist flung untidily across the mountain face. For the whole 250 miles of our northward drive, we had to the east of us this central spine of mountains—the Chaîne Centrale—running parallel to and towering up to 5,000 feet above the road.

Thirty kms. from Noumea, we passed through Paita, an historically interesting tract of country which now belongs to the heirs of the first white colonist on the island—the Englishman, John Paddon. Paddon was originally settled on Ile Nou, the small island opposite Noumea, now used by Pan-American Airways as an air base—and when the French decided to use Ile Nou as a convict prison, they gave him 60,000 francs, and a large tract of land at Paita, in exchange for his island.

From Paita the road leads through niaouli scrub land to La Foa, 118 kms. from Noumea. The 'niaouli' tree, which flourishes in most districts in the colony, is a type of stunted 'eucalyptus,' from which, by the way, the French manufacture 'niaouli' oil—in every way identical with our Eucalyptus oil. The flattened stem leaves of the niaouli are finer than most Australian varieties of the Eucalyptus, and in summer the trees make a fine showing with long white, bottle-brush flowers.

From a point overlooking the ocean, just before entering La Foa, one can see a black spot, far out at the reef, where a thin white line betrays the presence of a boiling surf. My host has good cause to remember that black spot—which represents all that is left of *La France*, the largest sailing ship ever built.

At the famous 'Hotel Banu,' La Foa, over a cup of home-grown coffee and rolls with guava jelly, M. Calimbre, who at the time of the wreck of *La France* operated the only salvaging and stevedoring fleet on the island, recounted the story. He was engaged in stevedoring operations in the extreme north of the island, when he received an urgent message to go to the rescue of a French sailing ship which had run on the reef opposite La Foa. He set out with his tugs at full speed for La Foa, and to his amazement, although there was not a drop of water inside the boat, and she was still in an upright position on the reef, the Captain was nowhere to be seen. Ascertaining that he was at Hotel Banu, La Foa, M. Calimbre went ashore and found the Captain 'en train de faire la bombe' (on the razzle).



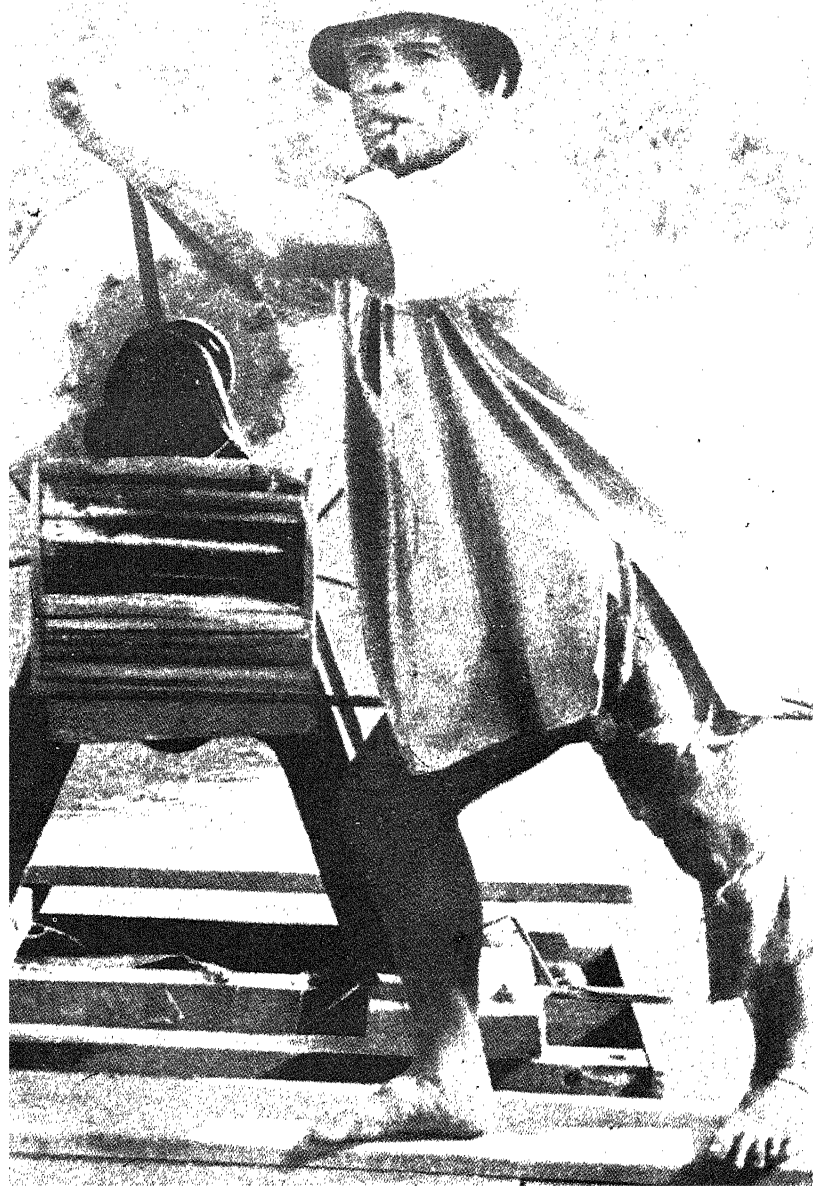
The Captain wasn't at all in a hurry to commence salvaging operations, and the disgusted pilot, who had been on the boat when she struck, maintained that the Captain made no effort to avoid the reef. M. Calimbre could get no satisfaction from the drunken captain, and continued on to Noumea, to see the agents and arrange for salvaging the cargo. The agents at Noumea could do nothing without getting in touch with Bordeaux. Cables were sent off asking if they might salvage the cargo. Meanwhile days were slipping by, and the ship showed signs of breaking up.

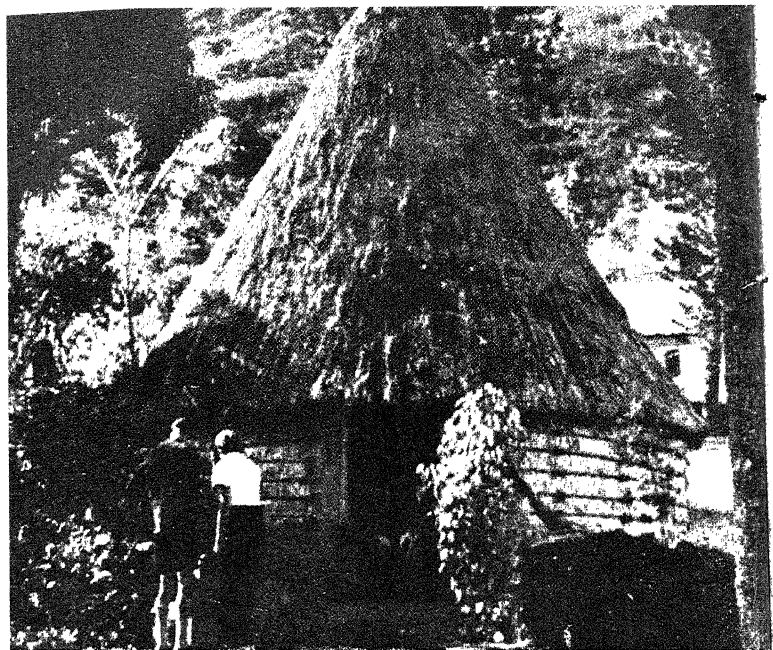
Cable after cable was sent to the owner at Bordeaux, and by the time word was finally forthcoming—some weeks later—that the cargo might be salvaged, the ship was practically a total wreck. To-day, the only portion of *La France* left is a great piece of her iron hull firmly wedged in the coral.

Hotel Banu, La Foa, has played many roles in New Caledonian history, from the time, when it was the scene of the outbreak of the native revolution in 1878, till the days in September, 1940, when it was the temporary prison of Colonel Denis, the deposed pro-Vichy Governor, who was afterwards expelled from the colony. 'Ooh, la, la, he was a one, that one,' said sun-tanned M. Banuelos, the hotel proprietor, when I asked him about Colonel Denis. 'He told us that we'll all get shot when he comes back to New Caledonia again.'

Leaving La Foa for Bourail, one sees at Fonwarry the first tangible evidence of the convict days—in the form of the remains of a training farm for children of deportees. Almost hidden by the slim-tapered 'Pins Colonnaires'—the graceful New Caledonian pines—the walls of the main building have been reduced to crumbling ruins. Only the heavily barred guard house in front still retains its shape.

At Bourail, after Noumea the most important town in the colony, there are many examples of the convicts' work. Bourail was once the chief convict centre in the colony, and from the handsome palm-surrounded gendarmerie high





over the town, to the butter factory and walled post office, the buildings are almost solely built by convicts.

On previous visits to New Caledonia, I had always been at a loss to understand why such a colony, with rich pasture lands, and supporting tremendous herds of fat cattle, should have to import butter and cheese—and milk in tins—from Australia.

‘Well, you see, it’s this way,’ explained M. Danton, the proprietor of the Bourail butter factory. ‘First of all our farmers can get very good returns from beef-raising, which requires no labour at all. Secondly, the milk up till now has been of very low butter-fat content, because we had no good grasses, and nobody was interested in breeding decent cows. The last few years, we’ve made a start at building up our herds by buying thoroughbred stock from Australia, and trying to get the farmers to improve their pasture lands. Our milk has recently shown a big improvement and averages about 3.1% butter-fat, compared to the previous figure of 2.6%.’

As in Australia, milk isn’t allowed to be sold until it contains at least 3.5% butter-fat, and most dairy herds average 5% to 6%; it seems that New Caledonia still has a lot of leeway to make up before their dairy industry can be said to be in a flourishing condition.

Even in this bad state of the New Caledonian dairying industry many people see the result of the cheap labour system. From the very earliest days the colonists had free convict labour supplied them, and even when the convicts became libérés with their own land they themselves preferred to use indentured labour rather than work the land themselves. The result is that any sort of manual labour at all, even on the land, is regarded as ‘kanaka’ or ‘coolie’ work, and beneath the dignity of white people. Where in most countries the farmer sets to himself with plough or tractor, and cultivates the soil, in New Caledonia they seem to prefer to have gangs of Javanese about the place, doing the work by hand. Everywhere throughout the interior of the colony one sees rich land going to waste, farm-houses in a dilapi-

*Facing Above:* The old beehive-shaped native hut, with single opening.

*Below:* The modern open type hut provided by the administration.

dated condition through lack of repairs and paint, cleared land going back to niaouli and lantana scrub through neglect. One has the impression of a colony being run on the cheap, not because of a poverty of means, but because of an absurd belief on the part of the whites that to actually participate in the work on the land is to be degraded to coolie level.

An interesting relic of the old days exists in Bourail, at the 'Ecole des Jeunes Filles' (Girls' School), which in former times was the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph de Cluny—the scene of an institution known as the 'Mariage de Bourail' (Bourail Wedding). The convent—or 'House for Correction of Females' as it was then known—was a type of prison for female deportees. To facilitate the development of the country, libérés—liberated convicts—were allowed to come to the convent on certain Sundays after mass, and select their future brides—any marriages contracted before they left Europe having been conveniently cancelled by the authorities. Once the choice was made, the courtship took place—under the strict supervision of the Mother Superior—each Sunday, until the pair were well enough acquainted to get married, usually after two or three meetings.

When there was a sufficient number of couples ready to warrant the trouble, a mass wedding would be held at the Town Hall, following which the whole village would celebrate with a grand ball. My host was able to describe the ceremony with great detail, having attended a super-wedding feast following the tie-up of twenty-one couples. The newly wedded pairs were given a grant of land and a house by the government, and were free to start life over again.

Continuing on from Bourail, the next village of importance is Poya, where we arrived in the full heat of the day. Poya is one of the loveliest places in the island—with sleek, prime cattle up to their middles in luscious paspalum grass, in small sheltered paddocks hedged with great clumps of feathery, waving masses of bamboo; with fields of coffee, the plants weighed down under the load of close-packed green coffee beans. Poya, with its steely-blue river, its air

of placid fertility, and its mountain background, seems to belong to the Rhone Valley rather than to a South Sea island.

Arrived at the last village on the day's schedule—Pouembout—there were still more surprises in store. On each side of the road were acres of ground planted with bushes covered in fluffy white balls that hung on the bare stalks like sheep's wool on a barbed wire fence.

'Cotton,' explained M. Calimbre. 'It grows marvellously here, but the prices aren't good enough to warrant its harvest.'

Leaving Pouembout, after calling at an ancient stone building for a large dish of white cheese, which my host handled reverently, our car turned down a narrow track fringed with coconut palms, to the edge of a wide river, where a motor launch awaited us. It appeared that my host had an island week-end resort, where we were going to spend the following day. I was introduced to a huge, squat native not more than five feet high and nearly as broad, who looked the perfect caricature of a missionary-filled cannibal. This was Emile, 'High Commissioner' of Konienne Island, for which our launch was bound.

Emile and half a dozen more 'boys' transferred our luggage to the launch, and as the last light of day faded away mooring ropes were cast off and we were on our way down stream.

It was a magic voyage, with a new moon throwing a silver cone of light to guide our course. After a full day's travelling, we could appreciate the peace and harmony of the river, the perfect symmetry of the densely packed mangrove trees which line the banks, reflected in the water, so that one could no longer distinguish between reality and its shadow. A turn of the river sent the prow of the boat full into the path of the moon, ploughing the silver lane into two furrows of water that fizzed and sparkled like champagne. The mutter of the motor caught the rythm of the ripples on the water. At times the noise of the engine was muted as the propeller painfully churned up murky water over a sand bank, and the natives silently produced long bamboo rods and poled the boat into deep water again. Fleecy clouds

filled the sky, and the water became a gleaming white canvas, with scrubby patches of rubbed charcoal where darker clouds drifted across.

The avenue of mangroves widened into a great open space as the boat entered a lagoon bounded many miles out to sea by the sheltering coral reef. Far away, lights appeared in a dark smudge on the horizon, and M. Calimbre's island began to take shape. 'High Commissioner' Emile announced our arrival in the time-honoured way. His fat lips pursued round the end of a conch shell, and his massive cheeks inflated to an alarming extent, he sent out a low-booming note across the water—a high-pitched one. Then with a curious yodelling effect he switched from one note to the other, announcing, doubtless, that everybody was well—and looking forward to supper.

The motor cut out, the steersman who had stood erect for the whole seven-mile voyage peering into the dim light and steering with his naked foot on the rudder arm, pushed sideways with his foot and with a long swirl the boat came alongside the wharf at Konienne Island—the 250-hectare week-end home of M. Calimbre.

## EMILE, THE 'HIGH COMMISSIONER'

THE establishment at Konienne consisted of Emile and his wife, another native couple, and about eight or nine native 'boys' to keep the place in running order, with two Javanese couples to do the cooking and act as domestics. Except for a few coconut palms and guava trees, the island was fairly barren and only supported a few goats and fowls. Nevertheless, the Konienne subjects lived like kings and ate like gourmands.

The bajou (Javanese girl) who served supper a half-hour after our arrival at Konienne seemed deeply concerned that I preferred to butter my own bread. Such a thing, after all, was hardly a white man's work. Her chief pride was in seeing the 'patron'—M. Calimbre—should only have the actual effort of transferring the food from plate to mouth.

Three or four dozen oysters, gathered from the roots of nearby mangrove trees, a great dish of crab, caught on the mud beach at Konienne, together with some scores of shrimp, completed the 'hors d'oeuvres'—for the fish course a 7-lb. loche saumoné hooked in the surrounding waters. The entrée was the most surprising dish, and one I probably wouldn't have eaten had I known its contents beforehand—roussette sauté—flying fox. These latter are considered a great delicacy in New Caledonia, I discovered later, and have a flavour something like chicken's giblets. For our roast, collier blanche, a type of giant pigeon which had been shot by Emile, and to complete the gargantuan repast we had guava jelly and goat cream cheese—followed by island coffee.

The surprising thing was that apart from the coffee and cheese all this—almost disgusting—array of food came from Konienne, or at least within gunshot of the island. Even the goat cream cheese was usually made at Konienne, but



at the time of our visit the goats had to provide enough milk for their families as well as for household purposes, and there was none left for cheese.

Despite my host's bulk and age, his energy seemed inexhaustible, and at 5-30 next morning, while we drank our coffee and goat milk, he was anxiously looking at the sky and making it clear that we should have been up at least an hour earlier if we wanted to carry out our day's programme.

By the time the veil of mist was rolling up from the mountain opposite we were in the launch again—this time headed out across the lagoon for the reef. Fishing was the order of the day, and while I was still rubbing the sleep from my eyes, Emile and six of his compatriots were preparing the fishing gear. Any self-respecting angler would have scorned the murderous-looking tackle that the boys were producing. Emile took over the most important task of attaching copper-wire leads to the 4-inch hooks, while a couple of the others cut up 8- or 9-inch fish for bait, or prepared lead sinkers weighing at least a couple of pounds. The lines—as thick as one's little finger—were paid out over the back of the boat to remove the wrinkles as the boat chugged its way out to the 8-mile-distant reef.

There was hardly a ripple on the water, and even in the pass at the reef where we shut off the motor there was only the gentlest swell.

Fishing, in the manner we did, was only just fishing. For my part I dropped the line over the edge of the boat, let it run through my hands till by its slackening I knew it had struck bottom. Then I waited for a soggy tug. Hauling the line up I pulled into the boat with monotonous regularity huge 10-pound loche—or gropers. The natives released the fish from the hook, threw them into large wet potato bags, and re-baited my line.

For about an hour great 9- and 10-pound loche and rock cod were whacking the sides of the boat, and the 'boys' were kept busy unhooking fish and baiting lines for Emile, M. Calimbre and myself. After we had pulled up twenty-nine fish and lost about a dozen hooks and sinkers, the fish stopped

biting, and Emile shook his head sadly, bemoaning our bad management in getting away so late.

It was still very early and M. Calimbre decided to take me on an off-the-record-excursion to fill in the rest of the morning. Sails were rigged and, with a spanking breeze to fill them out and boost up the engine, we set a course for the mouth of a mangrove-lined river, which we followed along to where a thatched-roof shed and primitive wharf, served by trolley lines, denoted some form of industry. As we tied up at the shaky wharf, my host informed me that we were about to visit the 'Franco' chrome mine—unique in the world.

It was not very impressive looking. The plant consisted of a few ordinary tip-trolleys, and a grooved steel washing table. The raw material was dark-coloured beach sand, which seemed very much like any ordinary sand. But this was different—it had tiny particles of chrome in it. Long scarfs along the beach showed where fillets of sand had been taken out, and M. Calimbre explained that it is simply shovelled into the trucks and rolled along to the grooved washing tables, where the chrome is separated from the sand by the extraordinarily simple device of agitating the tables while water flows over the top. The lighter sand is floated off, leaving 55% pure chrome on the table.

There was a great heap of 3,000-odd tons of it standing there, black and sparkling under the morning sun. My host explained that many of the beaches in New Caledonia had a high proportion of chrome in the sand, but in the majority of cases iron was also present, and no satisfactory method had been evolved to separate the iron from the chrome. The surprising and remarkable thing is, that as fast as the sand is dug out and treated, the sea washes more up again. There seems an inexhaustible supply of this precious chromite along New Caledonia's beaches, waiting to be picked up.

Back at the island kingdom we still had an hour to fill in before lunch, and this hour was profitably employed by Emile and his staff in dealing with our morning's catch. I felt a little less ashamed of my unsporting fishing when I knew

that the fish were not to be wasted. In a long shed, under the shade of some overhanging coconut palms, the island subjects were hard at work scaling, cleaning, scrubbing, slicing and salting fish. After selecting a couple of fish for kitchen use, the rest were split down the middle, turned inside out and salted, and strung on long wires to dry in the sun.

For anybody that has the energy and initiative to catch fish and treat them in this simple fashion, there is a good market for the result of his labours. Salted fish is a much-prized article of food for the mine-owners, who, having to provide food for their coolie labourers, find the dried fish cheap and nutritive.

For those people who believe that the Kanakas are stupid people, incapable and unwilling to learn, I should like to present Emile as the living proof of their error. Emile has had no schooling, and arrived in New Caledonia from the Loyalty Islands when he was twelve years old, entering M. Calimbre's service as house boy almost immediately. As far as concerns the running of the Konienne establishment, there seems nothing he can't do. For three and a half weeks out of every month, he is in sole command of the colony. He keeps the engines of the launch, the water-pumping and electric light plant in perfect running order, tends the flocks of sheep and goats, supervises the treating, drying and packing of the fish, the growing of the island's vegetables and a hundred other operations. He is a crack shot with rifle or shot gun and, when the community gets tired of island fare, he takes the launch across to the 'Grande Terre' (mainland) and shoots a deer or two.

The peak of my admiration for Emile was reached after lunch on the day of our fishing excursion. Noticing that his great, broad weatherbeaten face had taken on an unnatural pallor, I followed him across the clean-swept courtyard into a small shed. There was Emile, his head bent low over a wooden trough, his arms working like flails, kneading dough. Added to all his other attributes, this Melanesian factotum is the island bread-maker.

M. Calimbre avers that the terrific punching and slapping which Emile deals out to the dough helps him to work off his surplus fat, at the same time giving extra lightness to the bread. That evening, as Emile pulled the crisp brown loaves out of the stone oven and piled them into a wheelbarrow, preparatory to wheeling them back to the kitchen, he handled them and crooned to them like a mother to her first-born babe.

An exploration of the island—which has been occupied by M. Calimbre for the past forty years—proved very profitable. The island must have been used as a great feasting and burial ground in the old days. As the nearest place within miles of the reef and fertile fishing grounds, it is situated in an ideal spot for such a purpose.

As we walked across the island to the side facing the reef we passed over acres and acres of all types of shells—oysters, conch, giant clam, and many others unknown to me. There were great hillocks composed of solid masses of shells, and M. Calimbre told me that they extend to a depth of at least two metres. Two thousand tons have already been removed for burning into lime, and one can hardly see from where they have been taken. Both Emile and M. Calimbre were certain that they represent an accumulation of hundreds of years, during which time the island was used as a feasting ground. Who knows what scenes were enacted there on nights when the moon was high, cool night winds rustling through the palm fronds, the murmur of the surf in the background, and flotillas of great outrigger canoes, piled to the gunwale with shell fish gathered from the reef, slid along the lagoon to be pulled high up on the beach by dusky revellers?

As my imagination began to run riot, with the possibilities of native feasts, and 'pilou-pilous' (corobborees) with perhaps a few missionaries or traders to supplement the shell-fish, M. Calimbre interrupted my thoughts by inviting me to inspect something which I hadn't previously noticed. Shells crunched to powder under our boots as we strolled across to an immense banyan tree, propped up by thousands

of roots and arches. In the shadows of these roots was a possible gruesome explanation for the feasting. Bleached bones lay scattered about, and as our eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, we could see the empty sockets and sardonic grin of human skulls. Smooth, and grey, they lay about in various stages of preservation, some still with teeth intact, and surrounded by arm and leg bones. In places the roots and branches had grown around the human bones and skulls—the latter deeply embedded in the flesh of the tree.

‘There were hundreds of these when I came,’ explained M. Calimbre, ‘but the Javanese boys kicked them about, and threw them away. Not the natives though. They won’t have anything to do with them.’

This macabre display, coupled with the plentiful evidence of feasting, prompted me to ask Emile if the bones were relics of cannibalistic feasts, but in a rare burst of English he replied :

‘No. No killem and eatem. They jus’ get sick. People take ‘em to ole man banyan tree an’ leavem there. They jus’ die. Puttem in tree lookin’ t’wards sea, then no debbil fella’ he come an’ gettem.’ At the time I thought Emile was only defending the honour of his Melanesian compatriots, for most natives are very loth to admit that their ancestors indulged in cannibalism. Later, however, in one of the earliest books written on New Caledonia I found confirmation of Emile’s explanation.

Elysse de la Hautière describes in his book *Souvenirs de la Nouvelle Calédonie* (1869), something of the funeral customs of the New Caledonians. ‘The funerals of the New Caledonians vary according to districts...but the majority of the tribes has a forest near the village or—if there is no forest—a dense thicket, where the bodies are exposed, sometimes in the branches of trees, sometimes standing up ; their backs leaning against the trunk. There is nothing more strange and at the same time more ghastly than the aspect of these burial places, where the stillness of death is disturbed only by the lonely cries of birds of prey quarrelling over the flesh of the latest arrival. Here the remains of a

skeleton, whitened by time, stud the ground, there a carcass—submitting to the fatal law of nature—gives birth to, or at least helps to produce those repulsive beings who also have their mission in the great machinery of nature—if only in its lowest form. Here and there hanging in the branches are the arms, bracelets, ornaments of the warriors, the belts and necklaces of the women. Taro, ignames (sweet potatoes), coconuts and sugar cane are deposited on the ground as a sort of sacred offering. Even the pot of clay for the cooking of the food has not been forgotten. At the edge of the thicket under a hundred years' old banyan tree, where the powerful branches reaching to the ground form symmetrical galleries around the trunk, lies the body of a chief, surrounded by his arms and covered with ornaments : not far away stands the silent guard of these sacred remains and—not without emotion—does the visitor meet a living human of such appearance in a place he believes to be deserted. The one we saw at Kanala (East Coast village) was an old man still robust and of tall stature. His chest was painted a lustrous black ; his head adorned with an immense bonnet of black material with white feathers, he stood sombre and silent armed with his casse-tête (club), his eyes guarded the peace of the dead, his physiognomy—a little cadaverous—of marble immobility. He had, in a word, acquired the physique of those whom he guarded.

By the way, it is a great honour to be summoned to guard those called away by "aliki" (native god of death). To be so favoured, one must first of all belong to the aristocracy, either by birth, or by feat of arms. And the inviolability itself, which is inherent in these functions, is a heavy burden for the person ; for his existence becomes that of a veritable pariah. Contact with him entails the punishment of death. His food is carried to a certain spot, and he who carries it, having fulfilled his task, flees as quickly as his legs can carry him.

Another explanation offered by M. Clovis Savoie in *Histoire de la Nouvelle Calédonie* (1922) is also worth quoting. 'For the natives, anything at all is an excuse for

celebrations, followed by pilou-pilous: the birth of a child, circumcision, the right of a boy to carry a stick (insignia of male authority), marriage, visits between chiefs, return of a chief after prolonged absence, tribal war, family dance, planting of crops, erection of a chief's house, building a canoe, commencement of a fishing expedition, the death of a chief, etc. In certain of these pilou-pilous, several tribes joined together, and in the state of over-excitement caused by the singing and dancing—often lasting for days on end—the slightest excuse gave rise to inter-tribal quarrels and the feast terminated by massacres and scenes of cannibalism.'

Whether Konienne Island had been the site of solemn celebration of funeral ceremonies, and the skulls represented those warriors—and their wives who were strangled when the husband died—who were honourably placed there as custom demanded, or whether it was the scene of pilou-pilous followed by cannibalistic orgies, only the banyan tree with its treasure of human bones and skulls, could tell. It must have witnessed some interesting scenes during its few hundreds of years of life, but as it refused to talk, we made our way back to the island castle where another immense meal reduced me to a state of stupor from which the 'heure de la sieste' was the only escape.

Next morning, those subjects of Konienne Kingdom who could not make the launch trip, came to see us off on our journey back along the Pouembout River, where the car waited to take us northwards. Even Emile's pet deer swam 200 or 300 yards after the launch as a final farewell gesture. As we chugged up the river, fat cows which had come down for an early morning drink in the brackish river water, hardly raised their heads as the launch went by. Silver mullet went flashing through the air in all directions, and now and again, a fish like a small swordfish went sizzling across the top of the water, seemingly on its tail, with long piked nose sawing the air, until it took a final plunge. Wild duck and pigeons leisurely flew away at our approach, but never far before settling down again. The most amazing thing was to see the miles of intertwined mangrove roots packed with

oysters, and tiny bright blue crabs crawling up the oyster-laden roots as the incoming tide licked up towards them. Oyster-gathering at Konienne consists of cutting a couple of mangrove roots, and stripping off the five or six dozen oysters clinging to them.

From Pouembout the road passes through two tiny villages, Kone and Voh, which seem to have been transplanted direct from France. Some of the first free colonists settled in these districts, and they determined to make them little corners of France. The streets are lined with silver poplars, and the courtyards of the farm-houses are surrounded either by a square of poplars or New Caledonian pines—which from the distance remind one strongly of the tapering cyprus of Southern France.

The blue of the mountains here is spotted and streaked with red, where prospector's axe and miner's drill have been at work, turning the mountains inside out for their treasures of chrome, nickel, cobalt and manganese.

Concerning that richness of the New Caledonian mountains, there is a story that in the early days the International Copper Company sent an Australian mining expert to investigate the richness of New Caledonia's ore deposits. Sent back to England to make a report before the directors of the Company, he was asked by a distinguished titled director if he could give some indication of the quantity of copper, cobalt, nickel, etc., in New Caledonia. The reply was a model of forthright Australian utterance.

'My Lord. If you was to take all the — minerals there out of those — mountains, the — mountains would fall to pieces.'

And there was a good deal of truth in this colourful assertion. In proportion to its size, there is no country in the world as rich in minerals as in New Caledonia. Although no thorough scientific survey has ever been made, the colony is known to contain large deposits of almost every valuable mineral.

The commencement of prospecting operations in New Caledonia was not very auspicious. In 1856, seven French



prospectors left for the interior in the hope of discovering gold. They were promptly captured by natives, and with the exception of one member of the expedition, they were killed—and eaten. The remaining member was allowed to live, on condition that he explained the use of white man's firearms to the native chief. One dark night he escaped from the tribe and made his way to a camp of Englishmen on the East Coast. His experiences, however, sent him Crazy, and for the rest of his life he wandered from tribe to tribe, and being mad, was received as an honoured guest by the natives.

Another expedition which set out seven years later was more fortunate. Not only did they escape the fate of their predecessors, but they actually found gold—although in unpayable quantities. The following year, however, mining engineer Jules Garnier, sent out especially from France to investigate mining possibilities, discovered nickel at Mount d'Or, a mountain ten or twelve miles from Noumea. A ton of the crude ore was loaded into a whaleboat and rowed by convicts back to Noumea, whence it was sent to Paris for assay. The result of that assay led to the formation of the powerful nickel company—the Société le Nickel—which ever since has played a dominant role in the development of the colony.

The Société le Nickel is not by any means a French company. Many of the shares are owned by Krupps, and some of the largest capitalist concerns of Europe have an interest in the company. Nickel was discovered to exist in immense quantities, and mines sprang up everywhere. Gold miners who had not 'struck it lucky' in Australia poured across to New Caledonia, and prospecting and mining began in earnest. Within a few years, New Caledonia was recognized as being second only to Canada as a nickel producing country, and to-day it produces about 8% of the world's total supply.

Most of the mines are open cuts in the mountains from where the ore is easily transported on 'flying-foxes' to sea-level. Although about 30% of the mines are owned and

operated by small, independent miners ('les petits miners') the Société le Nickel really controls the entire output of the colony, in agreement with the International Nickel Corporation.

Nickel ore contains only 3% to 4% nickel, and therefore unless it can be smelted on the spot, and pure nickel exported, freight charges would make its export out of the question. The Société le Nickel owns the only smelting works operating in the colony, so that the 'petits miniers' either have to pay to have their ore treated at the nickel company's plant or sell their ore directly to the company. As the price for treating the ore is made so high that the independent miners could not compete with the nickel company, the latter has an effective monopoly, and by agreement with International Nickel Corporation, the New Caledonian output—and world prices—are controlled.

In connection with nickel mines, it is interesting to note that before the last war—from 1912-1914—the great German industrial concern of Krupps operated nickel mines between Boulouparis and Thio, just north of Noumea. When war broke out the mine was seized by the government and auctioned—and bought by the Société le Nickel, in which Krupps held shares. Actually while the last war was in progress, ships were regularly engaged carrying cargoes of New Caledonian nickel to Krupps, with the knowledge of the French authorities.

From 1935 onwards, the Germans again became interested in New Caledonian nickel. A buyer from Krupps was stationed almost permanently on the island, buying concessions, arranging for their exploitation, buying ore from the 'petit miners,' paying to have it smelted and sent back to Germany. When I was in the island a few months before war broke out in 1939, a Greek steamer loaded to the brim with smelted nickel for Germany ran aground on the grand reef, and at least a few thousand tons of New Caledonian nickel never reached the German armament industries.

Kone and Voh, the two villages we had just passed through, are two of the most important nickel producing

centres, and every few miles along the road, we could see the zig-zag tracks which led to the tip of the mountains where the red overburden had been turned back to get at the nickel ore underneath. Frequently we stopped to pass the time of day with Javanese mine-workers on their way, per pack-horse, to the interior.

Shortly after leaving Voh, we passed into the beef country. Surprising as it may seem, the meat-packing industry is developed to a high degree in New Caledonia. At Ouaco—under British management—is one of the most up-to-date meat packing works in the world. New Caledonian tinned beef fed Australian troops in Palestine during the last war, and huge quantities of Ouaco bully beef have been exported to Northern Africa during the present war. We drove through twenty or thirty miles of rich grass land which nourishes cattle as smoothly and prosperously fat as I have seen in any part of the world.

Not so very many years ago the country around Ouaco was infested with wild dogs, that made life for the settlers so unpleasant that many were forced off their holdings. Packs of these dogs made cattle-raising impossible, until a regular campaign was instituted, and they were cleaned out. Today there are known to be 160,000 head of cattle in the colony, while it is estimated that there are almost as many more roaming wild in the interior.

From Koumac to Nehoué was the most difficult part of our journey. The road was little better than a track which curved and dipped like a scenic railway, as it skirted rugged and broken mountains, and plunged down across dry riverbeds bordered by twisted, gnarled old niaouli trees. Nearing Nehoué, we reached one of the richest sections of the island. From a mountain that towered above us, left of the road, is produced nearly 8% of the world's chrome. The three largest chrome mines in the colony are all situated within a few kilometres of each other, Tiébaghi—the largest and richest chrome mine in the world—sits in a little depression on the dome of the mountain of that name. Fantoche and Chagrin, on each side of Tiébaghi, are situated on opposite

sides, almost at the base of the same mountain.

It is typical of the lack of interest taken by France in the colony that of these three mines, Tiébaghi is owned by British, Fantoche by American and Chagrin by Australian capital.

Chagrin is the first one to come into view, a newly-built village of adobe huts, accommodating 200 to 300 people, neatly laid out at the foot of a small rise. From a tunnel driven into the side of the mountain an endless string of tip trucks discharged their load of ore into waiting trucks, which trundled it off to a shed to be washed and graded.

Farther along the road, thousands of feet above us, we could see Tiébaghi, stacks of silvery-grey chrome contrasting with the red of the overburden, and the blue of mountains and sky. The main goal of our tour—as far as M. Calimbre was concerned—was now reached. Pulling the car in to the side of the road, we continued on by foot across about a mile of level country covered with niaouli scrub and heavily laden guava trees. These guava trees are a feature of New Caledonia, where they grow plentifully enough to be classed as a pest. Most New Caledonians—natives and whites alike—are very fond of the pink flesh of this lemony-coloured fruit, which is also the main standby for jam-minded New Caledonian housewives.

The sun was streaming down by the time we reached the foot of the mountain, and we lost a few pints of perspiration in the cause of science as we toiled up the mountain side to inspect a newly-discovered chrome deposit. Where rain water had cut a drain in the mountain sub-soil, we could see a long silvery trail formed by chrome particles which had been washed down the slope. Then we stumbled over a huge black rock, which M. Calimbre tapped with his little hammer, and pronounced to be chrome. A little farther, at the loss of a few more ounces of sweat, we arrived at a spot where a tunnel had been driven into the face of the mountain, and a stack of chrome extracted.

From two small tunnels with a six feet square entrance and a length of 20 or 30 feet, 500 to 600 tons of chrome had

been taken out. There it stood in green-grey 5 inch cubes containing about 58% pure chrome—according to my informant. We estimated the seam which ran diagonally across the face of the tunnel as about 23 feet across. M. Calimbre expressed the opinion that there was no reason why this newly discovered deposit shouldn't be as rich as that at Tiébaghi, which has already produced more than a million tons of high grade chrome ore.

In response to my questions regarding mining procedure in New Caledonia I learned some interesting facts: The first thing to do when one has discovered an ore deposit is to apply to the Mines Department for a 'permis de recherche' or Searching Permit. Provided no one else has the area under concession this is granted on payment of a few francs a year per hectare, the rate varying according to the type of ore. This 'permis de recherche' is valid for one year, but the administration may extend this for a second and third year.

By the end of the third year, either one has decided the concession is no good, or one converts the 'permis de recherche' into a 'concession.' The 'concession' is valid for 75 years, and can be extended another 25 years on the recommendation of the Mines Department. The charge is only 2.50 francs (about 4 pence) per hectare per year, but the holder must show that he is in earnest by producing from his concession half a ton of ore per hectare per annum.

This latter provision was introduced to prevent people from tying up concessions and then not working them, but its purpose has been frustrated as far as the large companies are concerned. There is no stipulation that each concession must be worked, so that large companies which may have concessions all over the island, need only work two or three of them, providing the total production averages half a ton per hectare over the whole of their concessions. By this means production of an ore can be held up and the price maintained though there may be a world shortage of the mineral in question.

Production of chrome in New Caledonia, however, can never be subjected to the same limitations as has been the

case with nickel. New Caledonian chrome ore rarely contains less than 45% chrome—and apart from washing and grading, no processing is needed. It is sold just as it comes out of the ground, and this allows even the smallest miners to sell their ore on equal terms with the larger companies, without having to depend on the good graces of the processor—as the nickel miners do.

The limit of our northward tour was reached when we arrived at Nehoué, headquarters of the American controlled Fantoche mine. The English manager gave us a hearty welcome—and achieved a miracle in producing ice-cold American beer in tin canisters—the first cold drink we had had since leaving Noumea. As is apparently usual in the mining sections of New Caledonia, it was taken for granted that we had come to stay a week or ten days. Unfortunately, we had to leave the same evening.

The manager urged me not to go into the mine as the dampness would have a bad effect on my camera. I began to understand then why the Dutch Government had forbidden the employment of Javanese labourers underground, because of the risk of tuberculosis. In any case, with the two hours at our disposal, it was impossible to make the trip to the actual mine, and I had to be content to see the processing end of the operations.

The ore is brought round the side of the mountain on a level grade railway from the mine—to a point opposite the processing plant. Here it is emptied into half ton tips—or flying foxes. This ingenious arrangement consists of two sets of double wires, one of which carries the full, the other the empty truck. As long as there is an 8° fall the weight of the full tip coming down pulls the empty one up, so that with two tip trucks a continuous supply of ore is hurtling down from the mine. With one man—or woman—at each end, the flying fox can shift 100 to 150 tons of ore a day comfortably.

A Tonkinese woman, complete in white coat, black trousers and immense mushroom shaped hat, stood at the receiving end, and tipped the trucks into a hopper, which directed the ore on to a revolving sieve. The fine ore passed through to

washing tables down below, while the lump ore was passed on to a slowly moving endless belt.

About half a dozen Tonkinese men and women squatted along each side of the conveyor belt picking over the ore, and dropping it into appropriate bins to be further processed if not of sufficiently high grade. Only the big lumps of high grade ore were carried over the end of the belt and dropped into waiting trucks to be taken direct to the wharves at Nehoué Bay, where there was on that particular day an American freighter waiting to take the ore back to feed the United States armament industries.

The fine ore which had passed through the sieve was treated on the floating tables in a similar fashion to that described at the Franco mine, while the poorer stuff was first crushed and then passed back to the floating tables to be washed. It is interesting to note that at Tiébaghi, at the top of the mountain, where the soil is much drier, the ore is of such uniformly high quality, that no washing is needed.

The whole of the population at Fantoche are indirectly or directly engaged in the mining work, and the manager showed me with pride the well-laid-out sports field and play-ground for the employees' children. The production of Fantoche is approximately 1,400 tons of high grade ore monthly—valued roughly at £5,000. To produce that, 130 Tonkinese, 6 Javanese, and 24 Europeans were employed.

An anomaly in French mining law is that no foreign company may exist in New Caledonia—that is, any company operating in the colony must have a majority of French directors, although it may have 100% foreign shareholders. The usual way of overcoming this problem, of course, is to form a 'dummy' company in New Caledonia with nominal capital and 'dummy' directors. While this law was no doubt designed to prevent foreign interests holding a controlling interest in the colony's mineral industry, it has created other problems.

If a foreign concern wishes to exploit a certain field it has only to form a local company with picked Frenchmen who are

willing to become directors. As they have little to do except draw their salaries, there is not much difficulty in finding the necessary 'dummies.' The danger is that these men are likely to work in the interests of those that pay them, even if those interests are sometimes in conflict with the welfare of the colony. This was clearly shown when the embargo was placed on the export of various minerals to Japan. Many influential business men in Noumea were receiving subsidies from the Japanese, as directors of Japanese controlled mining companies in the colony. These naturally fought very hard for a continuance of trade with Japan, because their subsidy would be stopped immediately production in the Japanese mines finished.

If the companies concerned had been straight-out Japanese companies there would have been no further argument about the matter, but as it was, the man-in-the-street had the impression that the embargo was affecting purely New Caledonian companies.

On the way back from Fantoche we passed what was once the greatest cobalt mine in existence, and M. Calimbre informed me that until huge discoveries of cobalt were made in America, cobalt was the chief mineral export from New Caledonia. The nickel-smelting works at Noumea, in fact, were originally erected for processing cobalt.

On arrival back at Pouembout that evening was celebrated with another huge feast, at the expense of a deer which Emile had shot on the mainland. To wind up the day, M. Calimbre told me of the only occasion that the Grand Reef of New Caledonia had ever given back a ship once it had laid its clutching hands on it.

The *Dunfreysshire* was a British 3-masted barque of 2,000 tons and was on her way to load chrome at Tiébaghi when she ran aground in the Poum pass, in the north of the island. Creaking and groaning in every timber, she was wedged tightly on the reef, and seemed likely to heel over completely any minute. Hauling down all but a few topsails, officers and crew abandoned ship, and set out to row to Noumea 250 miles away. They hadn't travelled very far



before they were picked up by a small coastal steamer also on its way to Noumea.

Meanwhile the incoming tide was swirling in through the jagged pass in the reef. Inch by inch the ship straightened up. A strong wind sprang up and filled out the topsails, and gradually, with wind and tide combining, the *Dunfreys-shire* lifted clear of the reef and slipped into the lagoon. The wind and tide turned her northwards, and by a piece of amazing luck, she dodged the reef and hundreds of small islands and sandbanks that dot the lagoon in that part of the island and continued on her way northward. Eventually the barque was seen by a Danish sailor as it entered Banare Bay, at the extreme north of the island.

Wondering at the haphazard progress of the boat, he pulled up his fishing lines and rowed across and boarded her. To his amazement, although everything on board was in perfect order, the only living being was a canary in a cage. He tried to work the windlass and lower the anchor, but it was too much for him. He clambered back on his little boat, and praying that no wind would spring up while he was gone, he rowed back to shore, picked up a boatload of natives and returning to the *Dunfreys-shire*, he brought her in close to shore and there dropped anchor.

The unhappy captain was in the depths of misery as the coastal steamer approached Noumea. As glum as a sailor who has lost his boat can be, he sought out Lloyd's agent and broke the sad news that he had run his ship aground. Lloyd's agent, who incidentally was also the British Consul, said: 'Yes, I've heard something about that' and handed the surprised skipper a telegram sent by the Dane announcing that the *Dunfreys-shire* was safe and sound in Banare Bay.

The captain never waited to have a meal in Noumea; he chartered the same coastal steamer that had picked him up, to take him and his men straight back to Banare Bay. When they arrived there, however, they had an unpleasant surprise. They found the Dane in possession of the ship, and standing at the head of the gangway, with a bloodthirsty looking axe,

he threatened to 'bust the skull of the first son-of-a-bitch, who dares set foot on my ship.'

There was a famous court case for possession of the ship. At first it seemed that the Dane must win, as he had salvaged her more than 12 miles from shore well outside territorial waters. The court finally decided, however, that territorial waters extended three miles from the reef, not from the shore, and as the Dane had found her inside the reef, he lost the case, receiving £300 however, as some compensation.

The next morning we motored back to Noumea and one of the most pleasantly presented geography lessons of my life came to an end.

## ACROSS THE CHAÎNE CENTRALE

AFTER returning from my trip along the west coast of the island, well-meaning New Caledonians kept throwing up their hands in horror. 'The West Coast, but there's nothing to see there. If you want to see something you must go up the East Coast!' and so in all humility I went and booked my seat in Messageries Automobiles for a trip up the East Coast.

At 5-30 one morning my name was read out of a list of passengers and I stepped forward to take my place among those bound for Houailou and Ponérihouen. As a special concession to my camera and typewriter, strict rules were relaxed and I was given a seat alongside the driver, with special instructions to the latter to stop if the front seat passenger saw something that he wanted to photograph. The market was in full swing, as we rolled past, round the Place des Cocotiers, to the Post Office, out past the Nickel Company's works, where blast furnaces were shooting alternatively great orange-coloured flames and clouds of sulphury-looking smoke into the air, and on to the road for La Foa, Bourail, Houailou and Ponérihouen.

The best part of the journey commenced when we swung away from the coast road at Bourail, and entered the fifty kilometre section across the Chaîne Centrale. Past the remains of an old sugar mill—which together with some land one of the early English settlers, John Higginson exchanged for the hire of 300 convicts for a period of twenty years—and the grey stone remnants of what was once a large mission training farm for penitentiaries, the road started to bite straight into the vivid blue mountains that are the special glory of New Caledonia. Houses were few and far between, though often we could see far below, in some snug valley, surrounded by a few banana palms and

clumps of feathery waving bamboos, native villages, usually set alongside the silver line of a stream. The hills seemed surprisingly fertile once we had left the coast road, acres and acres of rolling, undulating country, and great natural amphitheatres spreading out beneath us as the 'service' groaned and panted up the steep cuttings which led to the summit of the Chaîne.

At various points along the road, the driver with a blare of his klaxon that echoed and re-echoed through the hills and valleys, pulled in at some roadside hut to drop letters or some small parcel. Usually there was someone waiting on the roadside, or a breathless Javanese would come rushing out to carry in the mail and goods that were left. At one sharp curve in the road we stopped at one of these isolated homes, and I could see through the trees along a heavily-wooded valley, a winch at work pulling up buckets of chocolate-coloured nickel ore from a shaft at the side of a creek. Dark humid valleys were covered in semi-tropical forest, with huge myriad-rooted banyan trees, their branches hung and festooned with trailing vines; pomelel canaque with their beautiful red bottle-brush flowers, the waxy-leaved crimson-flowered tamanaos and giant kauri trees growing side by side with banana palms and lantana shrubs.

After the peak of the Chaîne had been reached we sat tight as the driver let the bus free-wheel down the other side of the mountains. The driver knew the road and the car's braking capacity better than I did, and I experienced a few sickening moments as we rushed along at forty or fifty miles an hour down a steep pinch that had a drop of a few hundreds of feet at the end of it, or which ran into a solid rock wall hundreds of feet high. The driver and most of the passengers sat there unconcerned as he swung the hurtling mass of steel screamingly round hairpin bends, using all his force to pull the wheel round, turning to exchange some wisecrack with a back-seat passenger every now and again.

It needed a more courageous man than I to tap him on the arm every time I saw a potential picture, although he

stopped with the utmost cheerfulness whenever I did so. The last part of our coast-to-coast journey was along practically level country, with a wide leisurely river on our left hand side, flowing through some of the best pasture land in the colony. It was in the hottest part of the day and great herds of cattle were cooling off in the river, standing up to their middles in water, gazing mildly at us as we passed. Behind us the scrubby grey-brown of the mountains we had just passed through had turned once again to bright blue, and great columns of puffy white clouds were impaled on their fantastic peaks.

We stopped at a mission station, where a couple of long-gowned, black-bearded Fathers came out to collect their daily mail, and we deposited a panting native mother, whose baby had a more insatiable thirst—or appetite—than I had believed possible in such a small body. Mission buildings and churches became more numerous as we approached Houailou, for this is one of the chief mission centres in the island, with Catholic and Protestant missions contesting the right to Christianize the natives. Coconut palms were in evidence in numbers for the first time and there was generally a more tropical air in this part of the island than on the other side.

From Houailou onwards, the road passes through the chief coffee-growing centres of the island. For a kilometre or so outside the village the road is very narrow and closely lined with tall poplar trees, which form a restraining wall for the sea of coffee that lies behind. Groups of native cottages were laid out in neat squares with well swept paths, and there was a noticeable difference in the types of natives and even in the sound of their dialect to those living on the west coast. Their skins were lighter, the features rounder and less negroid, their hair fuzzier, and their language softer. It is easy to believe the legend that there is Polynesian blood in the Houailou tribes. The natives seem better proportioned, cleaner of limb and less squat than in other parts I had visited.

The coffee-growing natives of the East Coast fall into a

different category to those that live in their remote valleys, and produce only for their own needs. These coffee-growers are by way of becoming small capitalists, and they can afford luxuries beyond the means of their mountain-bound compatriots. The East Coast natives have become more Europeanized and mix much more easily with the whites. The mountain tribes produce for their own consumption; the East Coast natives produce for profit.

In connection with New Caledonian coffee—which, by the way figures largely in the country's export with 6,500,000 francs per annum—I learned that it can't be grown out in the open, because of a leaf disease. It has to be grown under the shade of bigger trees—usually 'arbres noirs' (black trees) which obligingly shield the coffee plants from the fierce summer sun, which caused the disease. These amiable trees shed their leaves and in winter allow the maximum sun and light to penetrate to the plants, the rotting leaves providing in addition a valuable manure.

New Caledonian coffee grows in beautiful glades that seem to have been designed from a Watteau painting. The sheltering parent trees are planted first—in long straight rows with at least twenty feet between the rows, and between the trees. Once these have a good start the coffee bushes are planted between them. The 'arbres noirs' grow to about forty feet or fifty feet, and their spreading branches curve over to form leafy naves and grey-ribbed archways, under which the tops of the coffee plants—six or seven feet high—form a thick green carpet. The delicate tracery of the silver branches and the gleaming trunks of the 'arbres noirs,' the deep green of the coffee leaves and the red of the berries combine to make a New Caledonian coffee plantation one of the most beautiful examples of planned Nature.

Unfortunately, I missed the coffee-picking season. It must be an attractive scene, with popinées in their coloured frocks and piccaninnies with their shining brown tummies poking out, milking the deep green bushes of their red berries. I understand that the picturesque old coffee-bean hulling methods have now been dispensed with—on the

grounds of hygiene—but surely for their own coffee the tribal mothers still hull the berries in the time-honoured manner.

Fully developed coffee-berries are normally about the size of a small damson. Inside the red skin of the ripe berries are two kernels or beans, packed in jelly-like substance. In the good old days, after the coffee was picked the popinées took their baskets of freshly-picked berries and squatted on their haunches round the coffee-drying stand. A handful of berries would be put in the mouth, a quick snap of the strong white teeth would crack the skin, and with a dexterity born of long practice, the two kernels spat out from one side of the mouth on to the drying stand, and the wrinkled skin spat out the other side. The men-folk could be assured at least in this operation that their women didn't waste their time gossiping.

After the whole crop had passed through the mouths of the popinées—pipes of course had to be discarded during the coffee-hulling period—the expectorated beans were spread out on the ground to dry. Now the administration has provided concrete floors which not only hasten up the drying period but keep the beans out of contact with mud and worse. Every now and again, the beans are turned over with long rakes to make sure they dry evenly.

Incidentally, the Melanesians would be shocked at the way we prepare our coffee. They believe in roasting just enough beans for one day's use, so that their coffee is always fresh. I have never tasted better coffee than New Caledonian Arabica, fresh roasted and ground, and served with the thick cream squeezed from freshly-shredded coconut flesh.

The missionaries showed good judgment in selecting land in the Houailou area. The place seems fairly bursting with fertility, with giant taro, yams, sugar cane, bean fields, the extensive coffee plantations and coconut palms that look as if their tops must break off under the weight of the close-packed clusters of nuts. Leaving this garden centre we continued on to Ponérihouen with a broad river on our

right and on the left sweeping open valleys, thick with abundant grass and dotted with fat cattle.

Reaching the top of the mountain about two hours after leaving Houailou, at the end of a road which looked like a pierce of string flung carelessly across the grubby face of the mountain, lay a little patch of white houses—Ponérihouen, the terminus of Messageries Maritime East Coast service—and my destination. A last breathless rush down the winding road and up a small hill—and the 257 kilometre journey was over.

The hotel-proprietor, a young Frenchman, welcomed the driver and myself with a bottle of Marseilles beer off the ice—ice which was carried three times a week all the way from Noumea. A smart young popinée in modernly-cut slacks and bolero jacket and smoking a 'tailor made' cigarette, showed me my headquarters for my stay—a room complete with high four-posted bed and mosquito net, in a neat four-roomed bungalow. As is usual throughout the island, the casement windows as well as the doors were provided with wooden shutters, for the benefit of siesta addicts. From the balcony there was a magnificent view over a calm, gleaming stretch of the Ponérihouen river, reflecting the coconut palms that lined its banks, and the wooded bluffs that rose up behind it. At the back of the bungalow was an interesting looking path that curled round the side of a valley into the timbered mountains beyond.

The community at Ponérihouen hotel was overwhelmingly masculine. At dinner the first night, apart from the trouser-wearing popinée, we were all males—the hotel proprietor, his storekeeper, the local school-teacher, post-master, two other New Caledonians and myself. As is often the case with communities out in the backblocks these people were used to doing hard thinking and had original and well-thought-out reasons for the opinions they expressed. After the war news and commentary had been heard from the Sydney short-wave station, cigarettes were rolled and lit, coffee was brought in by a native boy wearing ear-rings, and



discussion started, about the war in general and the position of France in particular.

After politely asking my opinion of the happenings in France, there was a round-table inquest and some of the comments were as penetrating as any I have heard. 'Mais voyez-vous, mon vieux,' (Now look here, old fellow), said one of them, 'There's only one way to look at what's happened over there. It's just that same class of people that always fought against the 1789 revolution; that never accepted any change; that have got in power with the help of Prussian armies.'

'Mais non, alors ! Ah, no. The Nazis were too strong for them, that's all. They didn't know what they were up against.'

'Ah oui, oui, oui ! They didn't know, eh ! And you think those hoary old generals ever wanted to win that war. They only wanted to keep their own people quiet, that's all. That dirty pig Petain cried afterwards that France didn't have enough men. And there were soldiers in all these Pacific inlands, trained men—waiting to get over to the other side. Not one of them called up.'

'But what do they get out of it, anyway ? The Boche'll take all their money one way or another.'

'You see what'll happen. Those people never lose, anyway. French heavy industry'll tie up with the Nazis. As long as the war lasts they'll have all the orders they can turn out, and a Gestapo to keep their workers quiet.'

And so the discussion continued with the stark realism which one finds particularly among French workers. When it turned on the situation in New Caledonia itself, I was surprised to note the lack of bitterness felt towards those that had declared for Vichy.

'Now you see here; it was difficult enough for those people. They had their families in France, most of them. They didn't care so much for politics but they weren't prepared to be cut off from their people for years, maybe for always. That Petain crowd held all the cards. It's different for us Caledonians. Most of us have never seen

France, anyway. But I've got a lot of sympathy for some of them that left here. Not all of them, of course. I'd have some of the pigs shot if I'd had my way.' This was the opinion of one of the group, and seemed to meet with the approbation of the others.

After coffee and rolls next morning, I set out photo-hunting in this the most photogenic part of New Caledonia. Light mists were hanging low over the river as a black Charon ferried me across in a row boat, propelled by lusty sweeps of a single oar, manipulated rudder fashion over the stern of the boat. That morning I was fortunate enough to get a series of pictures which have since been reproduced in many different parts of the world.

As I followed the road running parallel with the river, a posse of cheerful-looking brown citizens armed with what appeared to be .303 rifles trotted past on horseback, with a shout of greeting that sounded like a roll of thunder. While I photographed them as they disappeared along the road, a couple more husky-looking natives came up behind me. They also had rifles slung across their shoulders, with string bandoliers. They grinned and stopped as they saw my camera, and swung their rifles round for me to get a picture.

I noticed then for the first time that the rifles were dummies—excellent models of .303's, complete with trigger-guard, but hewn out of wood. The warriors stood rigidly to attention while I took their pictures, and immediately the shutter had clicked they threw up their arms and whooped for joy, as all natives seem to do after their picture has been taken. When I asked them where they were going, they had an excited conversation for a few moments and then turned to me.

'You come alonga us. Bimeby we come to chief's place. You bring photo-box, eh? Make plenty of pictures.'

Such an invitation wasn't lightly to be refused, and I made back along the road with them, turning off along a narrow poplar-lined lane which cut through extensive coffee plantations. We walked past scattered niaouli bark huts, to where a cross-road led down to the river. Here, on a small

clearing where the grass was trampled flat, were gathered a couple of dozen native men and a miscellaneous collection of shining, pot-bellied youngsters.

My guides seemed as pleased as if they had captured a German spy as they led me up to the village chief and explained that I wanted to make some pictures. In response to my questions, the chief explained in excellent French that these men had all volunteered for the defence of New Caledonia.

'Nearly every man from my and the other two villages near here has enlisted. But there wasn't any room for them in the barracks at Noumea. They were told they'd have to wait. These boys, they didn't want to wait. They said they'd drill on their own, if the Governor would give them rifles. But there weren't enough rifles. They needed all the rifles they had in Noumea, to train and equip the recruits they had in the barracks. Well, these boys of ours weren't to be put off. They came to me and asked if I'd train them three or four mornings a week. They said they didn't want to be no damn blockheads when they were pulled into the barracks to be trained. So I promised I'd train them.' And the chief excused himself, saying that time was going by and his pupils were getting restive.

Within a few minutes he had them into line, presenting arms, forming fours, marching in double file, advancing at the double and in general learning the manoeuvres that infantry men have been taught for the last two or three centuries. Their uniforms consisted of tattered singlets and either shorts or loin cloths—the latter tucked up in front so as to allow free leg movement. By the size of the gleaming brown muscles which bulged out through the torn singlets, and the massive shoulders, one had the impression that these powerfully built people would do as much damage swinging their wooden rifles as they would in shooting with the real thing.

A couple of grizzled veterans who had fought in France during the last war, squatted on the ground and commented on the performance. One fine-looking old chap, with a





scrubby dark beard, and holding a baby on his knee, grumbled away, pointing with his crooked walking stick to defects in the bearing of the volunteers, and complaining no doubt that such conduct wouldn't have been allowed when he was in the army. The other, who had been a corporal in the last war, jumped up after a while and picked out the latest bunch of recruits from the others and gave them a bit of private coaching.

Half a dozen youngsters squatting on the concrete coffee drying floor gazed in wonder at the antics of their elder brothers and parents, while now and again a group of popinées walked past, loads of firewood on their backs, pausing long enough to remove their pipes and shout some ribald remarks to their men folk, no doubt asking them why they didn't drop this nonsense, and get back to the cultivation patch instead of leaving all the hard work to their women folk.

I learned subsequently that nearly all the tribes along the East Coast had organized similar training schools. If it is ever necessary to defend New Caledonia, it is certain that these natives will give a good account of themselves. With their knowledge of the country and their years of experience in fighting against the French they could be turned into formidable guerilla fighters. To send them overseas, however, seems to only invite a further lowering of white man's prestige in the islands.

After the last war the South Sea Island natives received a great shock when their compatriots returned from active service in Europe. For a hundred years, Methodists, Catholics, Presbyterians, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Bible students and missionaries of a dozen other sects had been bombarding the 'savages' from every possible angle, telling them of the benefits of Christianity and the superiority of white man's civilization. Then in 1914 these same people turned into recruiting agents and sent the 'savages' out to experience at first hand the glorious effect of 2,000 years of Christianity on white man's civilization as seen in the mud and blood of Flanders.

With thirty-six pictures of native enthusiasm for white man's warfare in my camera I set back for lunch to the hotel. A shout across the water brought Charon out from his thatch-roofed hut on the other side of the river, and within a few minutes he had rowed over to ferry me back. When we were about three parts of the way across, there was a booming shout from a native standing on the river bank near Charon's hut. He was gazing intently at the water, and in a few minutes a popinée rushed out of the hut with a long spear which she hurled across to him. He ran along the bank crouching low and still peering into the water. Several times he straightened up to throw his spear, but lowered it and following along the bank still crouching and staring into the river. Then while still about ten feet above the water, his arm went back and with terrific force sent the spear flashing into the water. There was a great flurry and the bamboo handle of the spear bobbed about like a fishing float on the top of the water.

It jumped the spear-thrower, and pushing the handle under the water, brought the other end out first—and there was a triangular-shaped flapping form on the end of it. A great roar of triumph went up, was echoed by Charon, and re-echoed by the popinée who had followed the hunter along the bank. With the admiring Charon and popinée in the background I got a picture of the spearman, with the stingray impaled through the head on the single iron-point spear, and its three-feet-long whip-cord tail twitching and thrashing. Whether the spear-thrower had deliberately aimed at its head I don't know, but by the way in which he 'shadowed' it along the bank, I shouldn't be surprised if he had waited till the head was in a favourable position before hurling his spear, so as not to spoil the body. Apparently Charon and his two companions regarded the fish as something of a prize, and Charon explained that there would be stingray soup for supper that evening.

The following day was Sunday, and I left the hôtel early with a vague intention of following the river down to the sea. There is nothing like the cool fragrance of a tropical

morning to sharpen one's appetite for walking, and the shady avenues through the coffee fields were most inviting. I hadn't gone very far, when a native came dashing down from between a row of coffee bushes, to ask me if I would come to his hut, and take a picture of him, his wife and daughter. He explained that he was one of the volunteers whom I had seen training the day previously, and wanted his wife to have a picture of him in case he was called away for military service. Wife and daughter appeared, gravely shy, and after the soldier had arranged them with flowers in their hands, he assumed a Napoleonic pose and the picture was made. He was very anxious to pay me in coin for the picture, but we compromised by my accepting a two-foot-long piece of sugar-cane.

After two or three hours' walking, the coffee fields gave way to coconut plantations, which seemed to have suffered from hurricanes. There is nothing more sterile-looking than a cocoanut palm which has had its head whisked off in a hurricane. With a long, bare, fifty or sixty feet-high stem tapering off to nothing, it is the most useless-looking thing imaginable. At another very wide river I enquired of the ferryman how far I had come from Ponérihouen and was told I had walked 15 kilometres, which meant that I was half-way to the next white village of Poindimié. The ferryman deviated from his task of ferrying me across, long enough to try and spear a couple of fish. He used pronged bamboo spears about four feet long, and shot them out of a five feet bow. He didn't have any luck, and I had the suspicion that there weren't any fish in sight, and he was just obliging the cameraman with a free exhibition of the unique bow and spear used by the East Coast fishermen. By the time we arrived on the far side of the river he had already hailed the rest of his family and friends, and they were waiting on the water's edge to have their photos taken in various heroic positions.

As I was half-way to Poindimié, and it wasn't yet midday, I decided to continue on, stay the night at Poindimié and trust to luck to get a lift back to Ponérihouen the following



day. The sun was high, and the shadows drawn back across the road were reduced to tiny black splashes round the bole of the coconut palms. I hoped I would be able to buy some bananas along the road, as I hadn't brought any lunch with me.

At the first group of native huts I saw after passing the river, I called in and asked if I could buy some bananas. I was refused and treated in such an abrupt and suspicious manner that I thought I must be amongst a different class of natives to others I had met. I went to several huts, and at each one had the same experience—equivalent to having the door slammed in my face. This treatment was so different to that encountered elsewhere that my curiosity was aroused and I demanded to be taken to the village chief. A surly-looking youth led me to the chief's spacious adobe hut, and a mountainous, thick-lipped man came out.

If it hadn't been for the size of the paunch which bulged out and hung over the top of his red and white loin cloth, his physique would have been perfect. His immense shoulders and straight back, his massive head and sturdy legs, gave an impression of immense strength, but the rolling, fat stomach showed that the chief had given way to easy living. A stump of an arm hanging in a blood-stained rag sling made me shudder inwardly as I shook hands with him. Leprosy is prevalent in many parts of the island, and it seemed a likely explanation for the missing lower arm.

The chief received me very solemnly, and without replying to my question about buying bananas, he began to question me.

'Vous venez d'oü, M'sieur ?' (Where do you come from ?)

'From Ponérihouen.'

'Mais vous n' habitez pas là, M'sieur.' (But you don't live there.)

'No. I come from Australia.'

'Qu'est ce que vous voulez dire ? Vous n'êtes pas Français ?' (Why, do you mean you're not French ?).

'No. I'm Australian.'

'Eh bien alors. Vous êtes Anglais ?' (Then you're English ?)

'I'm Australian.'

'Mais zoute alors. Australien et Anglais c'est toute la même chose.' (But damn it all, Australian and English, it's all the same), and his great face wrinkled all over with smiles, as he proceeded to explain that he thought I was French, and it was such an unusual thing to see a white man walking along the road, particularly in the heat of the day, that he—and no doubt all the other natives—thought I was one of the interned Vichy supporters who had escaped from their internment camp. But in a moment his face fell again, and his big brown eyes filled with tears.

'Ah mais c'est dommage. Nous n'avons pas de bananes. Ils ne sont pas encores murs.' (But what a pity. We haven't any bananas. They're not ripe yet.)

To make up for the dearth of bananas, however, he sent one of his boys scampering up a coconut palm to throw down a couple of drinking nuts. Taking the outer husks off on a pointed bar driven into the ground, a couple of taps with a tomahawk uncovered half a litre of icy cool coconut milk which has just sufficient tang in it to make it the most refreshing drink that it's possible to obtain in the tropics. The chief's big eyes grew still bigger when I told him I was going on to Poindimié, but he dismissed his surprise with a gesture which seemed to say: 'Well, with these English people what can one expect.' He waved his stump of an arm and bade me farewell with the traditional New Caledonian-cum-Australian phrase, 'Allez ta-ta !'

I hurried to the nearest stream to have a thorough wash, which I vaguely thought might help to remove any leprosy germs I may have picked up. I learned later that my precautions were unnecessary. The missing arm was due to other causes. The chief had been indiscreet enough to indulge in the forbidden sport of dynamiting fish. He was unfortunate enough to have held the plug of dynamite in his hand too long after lighting the fuse, and in the subsequent explosion had lost his arm.

A feature of the East Coast native huts is that the roof, instead of being of thatch straw as in other parts, is of niaouli bark inlaid with heavy rocks. Apparently the bark is laid on in big sheets, just as it is stripped off the larger niaouli trees, and placed on the frame of the roof, with big rocks laid on it to keep it down. This seems especially necessary along the East Coast where hurricanes are frequent. After a few heavy rains the niaouli bark goes into a sort of pulp, the rocks become embedded in it, and when it dries the whole roof is one solid mass of rock and bark. At first I thought the roofs were made of mud, because of the smoothness and compactness of the surface. The East Coast natives take more pride in their houses than those in other parts. The walls are usually made of adobe, and painted with a border design round the windows and doors and along the top and bottom, ending up with a crude painting of animals, each side of the doorway—perhaps a couple of pigs, or cagous—the famous barking pheasant-like native bird of New Caledonia.

The climate in the north-east of New Caledonia is about 10° hotter than at Noumea, and by the time I approached Poindimié, I was looking forward to one thing—a cold shower, some lunch and a sleep until the cool of the evening when I would set out to get some photographs. A popinée with a bag full of sweet potatoes and a handful of sugar-cane directed me to the local hotel, a long low building that reminded me of the old-time coaching inns of Australia.

‘On vous a mal résigné, M’sieur’ (You’ve been wrongly informed, M’sieur), said the severe-faced woman who answered my bell ring.

‘Il n’y avait pas d’hôtel ici depuis cinq années!’ (There’s been no hotel here for five years), and no amount of pleading on my part could alter her determination to have nothing to do with me, although I had the feeling that the place had been used as a hotel much more recently than five years ago. As there were signs that a storm was coming up, there was nothing else to do but to set out again on the 32 kilometres stretch back to Ponérihouen.

The one-armed chief who had supplied me with coconuts, was standing on the side of the road when I went past on the return journey, and I am certain that all earlier suspicion returned again when he saw me. Hadn't I said I was going to pass the night at Poindimié? He had a scowl like a breaking storm on his face, and as I was in a hurry to get back before it got too dark, I wasn't in the mood to stop and explain the situation.

By the time I had covered twenty kilometres the sun was already setting, and in New Caledonia darkness follows sunset within a few minutes. As I approached the Ponérihouen coffee plantations, I could hear the plaintive air of 'What A Friend We Have in Jesus,' and rounding a bend in the road, I nearly ran into a couple of popinées walking along hand in hand, probably returning from church service.

At the sight of my white shirt and trousers, their singing stopped and they drew to the side of the road. I asked them how far it was to Ponérihouen, but they were speechless—apparently with fright at the apparition which had burst upon them. Try as I did, I couldn't get a word from them, and I'm certain they thought they'd met a 'dhianoua' (evil spirit). It was after 8 p.m. when I arrived at the river, and hailed Charon to ferry me across on the last stage of my journey. Back at the hotel I had to minutely describe people and places at Poindimié, before the community would believe that I had actually covered 64 kilometres in about twelve hours.

The Javanese cook dished up a terrific meal for me that evening as compensation for my lunchless excursion. The main tem was grilled venison steak, as one of the hotel boarders had been out deer-shooting during the afternoon. Deer-shooting in New Caledonia, by the way, is almost a major industry. The introduction of deer into the colony sounds something like the story of the introduction of rabbits into Australia—and the results have been similar.

The wife of one of the first governors of New Caledonia was sent on a health cruise to the Dutch East Indies and Philippines. Being fond of animals—and probably wanting

to have something different to anybody else on the island—she acquired a pair of Sumatra deer and brought them back to the colony where they industriously set about laying the foundation for the present enormous herds that inhabit the mountains and valleys in the interior.

They have increased to such an extent that many settlers have been driven off their holdings, with their crops and pasturage clipped to the ground by the close-eating deer. Most of the big stations now employ permanent deer-slayers, and the export of deer skins averages about 150,000 per annum. Cynics maintain that the deer were originally introduced to provide cheap food for the convicts and coolie labourers—and it may well be true. In any case they are good food. Huge herds of them are known to exist, and some claim to have seen as many as 6,000 in one herd—although how such a calculation could be made takes one's imagination. Deer-hunting is one of the chief pastimes for the sporting-minded New Caledonians—and Island visitors; while a braised venison steak is as common in New Caledonia as a lamb chop in Australia.

At 5-30 next morning the 'service' arrived to take me back to Noumea. At Houailou, where we had to wait for an hour while the local mail was made ready for us, a great crowd had gathered opposite the post-office. By the mournful expressions on their faces, I felt that some disaster must have occurred, but presently a massive-jawed red-haired native soldier strode down from the post-office and began making the rounds of the assembled crowd, silently shaking hands with some, kissing others. Tears were coursing down the cheek of some of the older *popinées* as they pressed the hand of the grim-looking giant. I asked a bearded priest who was standing nearby, what it was all about, and he explained that the soldier was the son of the Grand Chief of Houailou, and he was making his last farewells before leaving for Noumea—eventually to go overseas to join the Free French forces in Africa.

It was a striking and mournful ceremony with not a word

spoken as the son of the chief said farewell to the village which he would probably never see again.

All the way along the route from Houailou to Bourail, wherever the 'service' stopped, there were little knots of grave-faced natives waiting to bid farewell to the Mussolini-like figure of the Free French Volunteer. One group which pressed forward to shake his hand, left one of their number behind—an albino girl, with light gingery hair, and pale skin covered with great pink freckles. Standing apart from the other she seemed a forlorn outcast. The bearded priest informed me that there are many albinos among the East Coast tribes.

Back at Noumea, the same people who had been urging me to go along the East Coast if I wanted to see the real New Caledonia, again threw up their hands in horror when I told them where I had been. 'What! You only went as far as Poindimié! Now what a shame you didn't go on to Touho, thirty kilometres north of Poindimié! You missed just the best part of the whole island!'

## JAVANESE, TONKINESE, WHITE MEN

A FEW days after my arrival at Noumea, I had an illuminating conversation with the little Javanese woman, whose duty it was to clean my room at the Grand Hotel Central. Unfortunately, to translate our discussion from its original pidgin French to pidgin English, is to lose much of its charm. Awes is the name of the Javanese, she is about five feet high, rounder in the waist than is usual with these women. Her mouth is full, with the lower lip slightly protruding as with most Javanese. Her hair is jet black, and hangs together—with a few brass coins for luck—in a heavy coil, caught in a net at the back. She works hard from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the hotel, seven days a week and her two chief delights are : (a) having her photo taken, (b) going to the cinema. Our conversation ran as follows :

‘Alors, Awes. Where do you come from ?’

‘Java.’

‘How old are you ?’

‘Don’t know.’

‘You don’t ? Hmm. Are you married ?’

‘Aaaah yes. Plenty times married.’

‘When you married for first time ?’

‘Moi ne connais pas. P’raps when I am ten or twelve.’

‘Where was that ?’

‘That long time ago—back in Java.’

‘Did you live together with your husband ?’

‘Of course. Live with him, with mama of me.’ (Mama pour moi).

‘You lived all same man and wife ?’

Here Awes laughed until her fat little body quivered like a jelly—‘We know nothing about love. Too young for that.’ (Moi ne connais pas faire l’amour. Trop jeune pour ça).

'Why did you come here to New Caledonia ?'

'Aaah ! Mama not pleased with my husband. She look for 'nother one for me.'

'Why ? Didn't he work ?'

Awes' big brown eyes opened wide in astonishment. 'He too young to work, Mama find other man for me. Old man and I no like him.' (*Moi non content de lui*). One day I run away. Far, far away. I walk all night, all day, all night, all day. Finish, I arrive Batavia. Mama not know. No one know where Awes gone. I very sorry for Mama, but not pleased to stop with old man.'

'What happened at Batavia ?'

'Friend of mine talk. "Why not go New Calendononia ?"' she talk. "Need no money. People give boat ticket." She take me to ship's office and soon I am "engagée" for Hotel Central. Go on board ship, and finish arrive Noumea.'

'How long have you been here ?'

'Finish seven years now. I come for five years contract to hotel, and now "ré engagée."'

'How much do you earn ?'

'Now get 120 francs (17/-) a month. First five years 60 francs (9/-).'

'And you married again here ?'

'Yes. Marry here three times. But proper marriage this time.' (*Ici moi connais faire l'amour pour première fois*).

'But how you marry so many times ?'

'Go to Mairie (Town Hall), get married. I sign paper. Finish like husband go back to Mairie and tear up paper. Quick finish.'

'And you want to stop here now ?'

'Me not pleased to stop here. Want to go back to Java. Have baby and see Mama.'

'Why don't you have baby here ?'

'No good that. Can't work here with baby. If have baby, job finished and no more money. No ! I have baby when back in Java.'

'What will you do if you go back ?'

'Make batik. Same like mother.'



‘Alors Awes ! You’ve been here seven years. How long you lived with first husband ?’

‘Maybe one year.’

‘And with second husband ?’

‘Oooh only few weeks.’

‘Then you must be about 21 or 22 years old.’

‘Peut-être. Moi ne connais pas !’ (Perhaps, me don’t know).

And Awes was certainly much less interested in her age than was I.

There are nearly 5,000 of Awes’ compatriots in New Caledonia and the history of their presence dates back to the very early days of the colony.

When the first settlers arrived in New Caledonia, they tried to make use of the Melanesian natives as a source of labour supply. The natives proved very truculent, and showed a decided disinclination to leave their native villages, and give up their simple pleasures of fighting tribal wars and dancing ‘pilou-pilous’ (corobbores) to go and labour on white men’s plantations. After the famous 1878 native revolution, the natives were left more or less strictly alone, and other labour sources had to be found. Some wealthy sugar-cane planters from the French island of Réunion thought they had solved the problem, at least as far as they were concerned, by obtaining permission to bring their Indian coolies with them. These latter were found unsatisfactory. As their transfer from Indian to South Sea conditions seemed to have an unsettling effect on them, their further immigration was prohibited.

The convict deportees provided the backbone of the labour supply in the pioneer days in New Caledonia. At first they were used by the government to carry on improvements in Noumea itself, in road-building and similar developmental work. Then an English settler named John Higginson, created a precedent by obtaining a contract with the government for the supply of 300 convict labourers for his mines and plantations for 20 years, with the proviso that those who died should be replaced. Many New Caledonians believe

that this contract, signed between the government and Higginson, laid the basis for much future trouble, and was the prime reason for the present undeveloped state of the colony.

As the colony developed, and the exploitation of nickel and copper mines commenced, the labour of the deportees was found insufficient. Partly because of the growth and militancy of trade union movements in Europe towards the end of the 19th century, and the fear of the mine owners that the introduction of free, white labour would lead to labour troubles in the colony, European labourers were not encouraged to emigrate. On the other hand white settlers were not much attracted to the island, because of the stigma attached to a convict colony, and the frequent native revolts.

The powerful international Société le Nickel, incorporated with Nickel Mond of Canada and the International Nickel Corporation, obtained control over most of the nickel deposits first discovered—but was without labour to exploit them. At about this time—the early 1890's—Japan was encouraging her people to emigrate, especially to the Pacific and South Sea regions.

The Nickel Company decided to make the daring experiment of importing Japanese labourers to work in the mines. On January 2nd, 1892, the first boatload of Japanese left Nagasaki for Noumea—under contract to work for the Société le Nickel. Within 20 years there were 2,500 on the island. Compared with the deportees, who had no incentive to work, the Japanese were industrious, reliable and temperate. With the thrift and energy of their race, the Japanese didn't long remain indentured labourers, however.

When their five years' contract was finished, most of them stayed on the island as free labourers or small independent business men, and the mine owners had to find new sources of labour supply. Once again the opportunity of turning New Caledonia into a first class, progressive colony with European workers and modern equipment was lost, and labour was recruited in Java and Indo-China.

To-day there are between 7,000 and 8,000 indentured Javanese and Tonkinese labourers in New Caledonia. The

conditions are usually a five years' contract, with a nominal rate of pay of 17.50 francs a day. Actually after food, lodging, medical attention and repatriation dues have been paid, the male labourer has about 80 francs (11/6) per month left. Opinion regarding the use of indentured labour on the island is very much divided. Some claim that the island couldn't have been developed at all without it, others claim with equal vehemence that it has in every way retarded New Caledonia's development.

To the extent that white labour has been organized in the colony, it has opposed the employment of coolie labour—mainly on the grounds that under the terms of their contract the coolies were not allowed to leave their place of work, nor were they allowed to strike. Breach of contract was usually punished by gaol. This was obviously a lever in the hands of the employing class who could resist any attempt by the white workers to raise their standards, by threatening their displacement with the coolie labourers. In point of fact, several strikes have been broken by the use of the coolies.

From another point of view, too, the use of coolie labour is criticized. Business men have compared the development of the nickel industry in Canada adversely with that of New Caledonia. In Canada where more initial expense was out-laid in setting up modern equipment, and European labour is employed, the extra initial cost is more than recuperated by the extraction of profitable nickel by-products, which are wasted under the more primitive New Caledonian methods.

Two conversations which I had with local employers, seem to typify the attitude of the whites to the coolie labourers. The first was with a young French mine-owner, who in most respects seemed to be more progressive than the average. In discussing the development of the colony he burst out with unusual vehemence.

'The whole trouble in this colony is the —— half-castes !'

I agreed with him to the extent of saying that it seemed to me the indentured labour system had its drawbacks.

'No. The system is all right. We need their labour. The

wrong thing is that our government is so blasted stupid as to give these Javanese and Tonkinese and half-caste brats the same education as our own children.'

'But surely, it's better to have them educated than have them running about half wild.'

'No, you're wrong. The whole trouble is these half-caste brats are more clever, or cunning or something. They always do better at school than our own kids, and when it comes to getting a job after school is finished, why they're accepted on an equal basis, and because they're prepared to work harder, they get all the pick positions.'

'Well, doesn't that seem to show that the indentured labour system should be stopped, and this made into a white man's colony?'

'No. We have to have their labour. You couldn't get white men here to go and work in the mines or in the plantations. That's no white man's job. The solution is to ship the coolies straight back where they came from, as soon as they've finished their five-year term. Not let one of them stay here.'

'But if you are prepared to accept their help in building up and developing the colony, you surely ought to be prepared to put up with the consequences. Probably the only inducement these people have to immigrate is that they have a chance of building up a better life, and give their children a better start.'

'To hell with all that. This is our colony. We need their labour, but we're not going to have them overrunning the place with their half-caste brats.'

The second conversation dealt with an entirely different angle. Driving back to Noumea with a non-French mine-owner, we called in to see a friend of his. The friend called for his cook to bring the essentials to make a rum punch. A few minutes later, a most beautiful Chinese girl entered the room. She had the smooth yellow cheeks and regular features, the full brown eyes and straight body which is so typical of the Tonkinese girls. When ordered to shake hands with us, I couldn't help noticing the look of poisonous

hatred that she directed to my mine-owner companion.

When we left again for Noumea, I remarked that this Tonkinese was a remarkably beautiful type.

'She's beautiful but venomous,' was the answer. 'As a matter of fact, she used to work for me.'

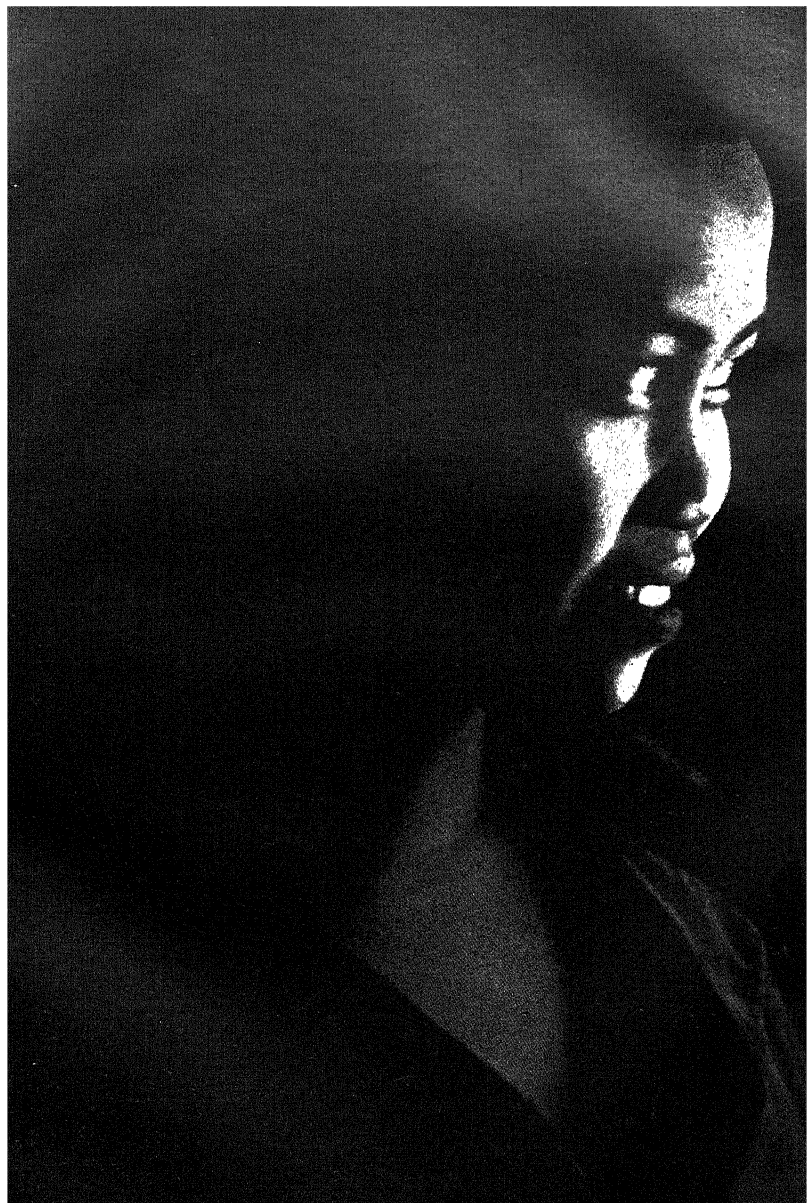
In response to my urging, he told me the following story.

'A few years ago when I was opening up that mine that we've just been looking at, I had a batch of Chinks come out on the *Pierre Loti* from Saigon. They were a lousy-looking lot, but this girl that you've just seen was a pretty good-looker then. You know how they are. She looked a lot younger than she does now, and had a bit of colour in her cheeks. When they came out to the mines, I made 'em put up a hut for me first. I had my eye on this girl, and when I found she was married and her husband was with the rest of the gang, I sent him back to Noumea. I got her in the hut then one day. By Jesus she fought at first. She was as strong as a man. But I was pretty fit too in those days. She quietened down after that, and we settled down pretty well.

'Not long after, I had to go back to Noumea, and this chap that we've just been to see, came up to manage the mine. Well, I was in Noumea for a week or two, and then the first thing I knew was this manager of mine was in the "boîte" (gaol). It appeared that one Sunday he tried to put it over the Chink girl, but she fought him an' nearly killed him; then she run down to the church. She sat on a log there, howling like hell, and the — parson came out, and there was the devil to pay. This interfering — of a parson had been up visiting the camp while I was away, and the Chink girl had the idea he'd protect her.

'The parson sent for the gendarme, an' he went up and shot my manager in gaol for assaulting the Chink girl. I went along and tried to square the matter, but this — interfering parson followed it up. There was a trial, and 14 days' "quod" for my manager.

'A couple of weeks after he was out of the "boîte," I'm blowed if I don't go into our eating house at the mine, and





there's this Chink girl sitting up at the table talking to him, leaning across towards him and laughing as if she owned him. I went over and knocked her down with the flat of my hand—right on to the floor. I said to him "You silly —. You ought to have more — sense than bringing that Chink in here, especially after she put you in gaol." He wanted to fight me at first, but I soon told him who was boss at my mine.

'I didn't want the Chink girl. I was soon finished with her, but I wasn't going to have her lording it as if she was a — European. I told him I was boss, and I'd bought the girl for five years, and I'd do what I liked with her. After that he could do as he pleased. An' he waited the five years, and now, you see the silly — lives with her—openly, so that any one can see.'

From investigations made after hearing this lurid story, it really seems that among many of the employers, it is taken for granted that they buy their labourers body and soul for the period of indenture.



## RELICS OF DEPORTATION DAYS

THE 'Place des Cocotiers' is to Noumea what the 'Place de la Concorde' is to Paris. Situated neatly in the centre of the town it is a long rectangular-shaped park, running right through the middle of the business section of the town. The lower portion of the 'Place' comprises a small botanic garden surrounding the statue of Governor d'Olry—famed for his pacification of the natives after the 1878 revolt. The 'Rue Georges Clemenceau' runs through the upper portion and splits round a large fountain in the centre.

'Place des Cocotiers' is a misnomer, because the only coconut palms are a few planted round the edges. Most of the trees are wide-spreading flamboyants, which in the flowering season, transform the whole 'Place' into one blazing mass of colour with their broad crimson flowers. In the evening, the Place is a favourite rendezvous for lovers—coloured and otherwise—but in the daytime, it is usually deserted except for bajous and their children in the morning, and a handful of dejected, weary-looking convicts, who never stray very far from its shady confines.

Looking for some picturesque types of these old 'bagnards,' as they are known locally, I found one day, three who seemed specially photogenic. They were all bearded ancients that I had seen individually several times, but this particular day they were seated together under the shade of an immense umbrella-shaped flamboyant. They made no objection when I asked permission to take their pictures, but the minute I started to focus the camera, three natives, who happened to be passing on the other side of the street, dashed over, as usual, to get in the picture, standing rigidly to attention behind the bagnards.

The Melanesians seem to get an immense pleasure out of having their photographs taken. As soon as a camera is produced there is a rush to be included in the picture.

They must have been broken in to photography before the days of high speed cameras. When the camera is pointed in their direction they freeze, remaining perfectly immobile, with a most solemn expression on their faces, until the shutter clicks. Immediately their faces relax, and with whoops and bounds they scamper away like school children off for their summer holidays.

Polynesians, on the other hand, are very reserved about having their photographs taken, and strongly object to tourists shooting pictures of them as if they were animals in a zoo. Unless one is well known to a Polynesian it is very likely that he or she will refuse to act as a free model for one's photographs.

After I had photographed the 'bagnards,' I left to walk back to the hotel, when one of them followed me and to my surprise and pleasure addressed me in easily understandable English :

'Excuse me, Sir. Would you be interested to buy some cowri shells ?'

I didn't want to buy any shells, but at the same time I had another idea.

'How much do you want for your shells ?' I asked.

'Well, there's a good bag full there,' and he plunged his hand into an oatmeal bag, pulling out a fistful of polished creamy pink shells. 'You can have them for 10 francs.'

'I don't want the shells, but I'll give you 20 francs if you tell me why you came out here, and tell me something about life in "Le Bagne."'

'But I'm not a bagnard. The others, they're bagnards, but I'm from Loyalty Islands.'

I noticed then that he was different from the other bagnards in that he had bare feet, which by the wide spreading toes looked as if they had never been inside boots. His skin, too, seemed a little darker than the others and with his trim beard and quiet grey eyes he had an air of self-assurance and independence that was missing in his companions.

'I'm Ben Thomas.'

With a name like Ben Thomas, in the South Seas, it seemed probable that he would have an interesting story to tell.

'Then you're English. That's why you speak so well?'

'No. You see, my father, he was Ben Thomas, too. He was a whaler. They all know about him here, all the old people, that is. My father came to Loyalty Islands a long time ago. He lived with my mother there, and she was a Loyalty Islander.'

'She was native?'

'Yes. Well, you see, he lived with my mother for a long while there, and my sister and I were born. My father, he wanted me to learn English, so he taught me himself. When I was 12, he got sick, and came back to Noumea. The doctor there told him he must go to a colder climate for a cure. He went back to America, but he promised he would earn some money and bring me and my sister over to school in America.'

'And he forgot all about you when he got there?'

'No. He didn't. After he's been there for a while, he sent some money back to Maison Ballande to a friend of his there, Dick Pentecost, and he asked Dick to take the money and bring my sister and me over to San Francisco.'

'And who was Dick Pentecost?'

'Why! Everybody knows about him. He was captain of one of Ballandes' schooners. Well, you see, he owed Ballandes a lot of money, so when my father sent the money to Ballandes, they took most of it to pay his debts. Dick said he would earn some more money and take us over to America, but Ballandes sent him on a trip around the New Hebrides. And you know what happened?' He looked up at me expectantly, and continued:

'The lugger got wrecked off Malekula, and those New Hebridean natives caught Dick and all the crew. You know they're pretty bad, those fellows. You know what they did to Dick and the rest of them? They ate them. I know all about it because there was a Loyalty Islander there and he ran away. At night when all the New Hebrideans were

around the fires, he crept back and hid behind the bushes to watch them. He saw poor old Dick tied up there.'

'Was he dead?'

'No. You know what they did? They didn't kill him. Every now and again one of 'em would just cut off one of Dick's fingers and roast it in the fire and eat it,' and the old chap put his fingers in his mouth and gave a graphic representation of a cannibal eating Dick's finger. 'They roasted his ears and toes and fingers one by one and ate 'em. Then they finished him off and cooked the rest of him. So that was the end of us going to America. My father wrote a couple of times asking why we didn't come, and then he must have thought Dick had pinched the money, and he got wild and we never heard of him any more.'

'And what did you do after that?'

'Why, I just came over here and worked about, sometimes picking coffee, sometimes on the plantations. But it's more difficult now. And old fellah can't do as much as the young ones.'

'Did you sometimes work in the mines?'

'No. Chaps like us don't work there. That's only the coolies do that.'

Even if Ben Thomas had invented the story it would have been a creditable feat for a man who had no schooling, but I was able to check up on the main facts and found them correct. I asked Ben if he could introduce me to some of his convict friends, so that I could get a few authentic stories of 'Le Bagne.'

'There's a poor fellow, Quer Urbain,' Ben said. 'You should talk to him. He's a poor old fellow, must be nearly 80 years old. You know, he doesn't have any money at all. He just sleeps in the park and people give him a bit of kai-kai now and again. An old fellow like him doesn't need much to eat, of course, but maybe you could give him a few francs?'

He took me back to Quer's favourite haunt, but as he was fast asleep under a flamboyant we never disturbed him. With his matted beard and hair he looked something

like a combination of John the Baptist and a Barbary Corsair. I recognized him from an earlier encounter.

One night when I was crossing the Place des Cocotiers on my way back to the hotel, a dark form suddenly detached itself from the shadows. A bleary, wild-eyed, tawny whiskered face was thrust within a few inches of mine, and a hoarse voice groaned :

‘C’est tout mouillé, tout mouillé, mouillé. C’est tout mouillé je dis.’ (It’s all wet. All wet, wet. It’s all wet I say).

Following this the ragged spectre thumped down to the ground again, and immediately began to snore in deep contentment. I encountered the old chap several times after that, but never had the opportunity of getting a story out of him. My chance came when I least expected it.

Sitting in the park one velvety black night, the dry swishing of the palm fronds and a few drops of water—heavy as treacle—preceded a downpour which sent me groping my way to the shelter of the bandstand. A rustling of fingers in paper was the first sign that there was someone else in the stand. The headlight of a car swung across the park, and hovered momentarily on the white whiskers, stained brown at the mouth, and the grizzling chest hairs curling round the open-fronted shirt of Quer Urbain. His fingers were delving into the far corners of the screwed-up newspaper, seeking the few last crumbs that remained. The car swept round the corner, and the dark was heavier and thicker than before.

A smell of garlic came closer, a crackled voice oozed : ‘M’sieur. Ca va tomber de l’eau. Si j’avais 20 sous...’ (‘M’sieur. It’s going to rain. If I had 20 sous...’)

Twenty sous were not much to give an old convict, but I wanted value for my money.

‘Bien, I’ll give you more than 20 sous, more than 20 francs, if you come over to my room and talk with me for a while.’

Twenty francs was more money than Quer Urbain had had in one sum for many years, I gathered, by his quick

acceptance of my invitation. After having warmed his insides and loosened his tongue with a little rum, he told me his story, which is dreary rather than exciting, but which was typical of stories I heard from other convicts. With much rambling and many repetitions as he strained his memory to recall this and that fact and date, the main story ran as follows :

His parents died when he was 12, and left him and his sister in the care of a tutor. When he was 15, he was sent to work to mind sheep, but on the very first morning he was too busy eating his lunch of rancid lard and cheese to notice that the sheep had strayed on to a neighbour's lucerne. The neighbour demanded 6 francs compensation, and Quer, too frightened to tell the tutor, never went home, but ran away to Ardeche, 'a poor province, but rich in sheep—and pretty girls,' the cracked voice told me. 'En effet it was there I met my first "rose."'

He entered into service with a family to look after the sheep, and—because he could read and write—to act as sort of secretary to the illiterate farmer, who had been engaged for three years in a law suit with one of his neighbours. Here he met the 'rose' in question—a girl six months older than himself.

'Ma foi ! One day we were together watching the sheep, and urged on by curiosity, we went into the barn. With no human witnesses, I took advantage of the favours of my little friend,' the wheezing voice went on modestly. 'The sheep watched us as if offended, and for my own part, I was seized with disgust. I was 16 then. Mais croyez-moi ! This feeling of disgust didn't last long, not more than an hour.'

'Enfin, those people had treated me as if I was the son of the house, but after that affair with the girl I had to leave. They were even silly enough to pay me my month's wages and 2 francs beside. The girl gave me a present of a 5-franc gold piece, which had been given her by her patron. I had never had so much money in my life before, and I went away this time ready for any adventure.'

For the next few months he roamed around the orchard districts of France, stealing fruit by day, and sleeping where he could at night. He arrived at Uzès, the first town he had seen, and there he fed himself by stealing the workers' lunches, and clothed himself by stealing their clothes from the washrooms at the factories.

'By that time I had no lust for work and was used to living from stealing. I arrived at Arles (Provence) in harvest time. The workers came from all parts to help with the harvest, Italians and Spaniards as well as French. I got to know a young Italian, and one day we stole 85 francs from a drunken worker. Then Barthelemi, my comrade, suggested that we go to Marseille, which cost us 7 francs each by train. When we got there we met another 'mauvais garcon,' and set about stealing properly.

'One day, in April, 1882, we saw a drunken negro sailor. We followed him to La Joliette, and just behind the fort of St. Jean we threw ourselves at him to rob him. Ma foi, he was so strong! He knocked me down and my comrade stuck a knife in him and took 8 sous, which was all he had on him. Five or six days later they arrested Barthelemi and took him to the hospital, where the negro sailor recognized him. They got me a few days later, and after putting me in a reformatory for eight months, they sentenced me on January 2, 1883, to deportation and ten years of hard labour.'

Quer Urbain was only one of 40,000 convicts transported to New Caledonia from the time that the *Iphigénie*, with 248 galley slaves from Toulon, dropped anchor in Noumea harbour in 1864 till the day the transportation ceased in 1894. Quer Urbain was one of the comparatively fortunate ones, in that he was classed as a 'forçat' and not as 'relégué.' There were four distinct classes of convicts in the colony. The first—the political deportees—were in a special category, and will be dealt with in another chapter. The second were the 'forçats,' comprising normal prisoners sentenced for one particular crime to eight years or more of hard labour. The 'relégués' were what we would call 'habitual criminals,' whose accumulation of crimes—in the opinion of the powers

that be—made them unfit to associate with normal human beings, and for whom there was no place in society. The last class were the ‘libérés,’ usually ‘forcats’ released on bond. The libéré was to all intents and purposes a free man. If the administration approved he could even return to France and apply for restitution of civil rights. He was assisted by the Colonial administration to settle down in the colony and was allowed to engage in any business he chose.

For the relégué, the most he could hope for was his release from custody. He could never return to France, nor could he marry or settle down on his own land. There was no way by which he could ever attain the status of a citizen again. Life was closed to him, and he could never rise above the rank of labourer.

The libérés were given a chance in life. The government set them on a piece of land, supplied them with material and tools to build a house, agricultural implements to work the soil, stocked them up with six months’ provisions, and gave them seed for their first harvest. They were given a generous trial period of five years. If they had made a success of that, the farm was given to them, provided they stayed there for ten years. After that they were free to do what they liked with it, sell it, lease it, or stay on and bequeath it to their children. If they failed, they were turned off at the end of five years, their children were taken over by a convent and placed on a penitentiary training farm, and the parents had to fend for themselves as best they could, hiring out their labour to other people, with little chance of ever rising again.

Conditions in the prison settlements were grim enough by all accounts of those that lived there. The inhuman punishment of the ‘Cachot Noir’ (Black Cell), in which a person was confined for years at a time without ever seeing the light of day, the whippings, and the brutal work that some of them were forced to do reduced many of the prisoners to wild beasts. Old residents say that a favourite pastime on the prison camps in the mountains was a game of cards, in which the much prized stake was death.



The convicts actually cheated one another and their guards to win a game—when the prize was the honour of being finished off by a quick bullet from the warder's rifle.

Despite inhuman conditions of 'Le Bagne,' the lack of discipline among the prisoners, and the number of so-called privileges received disgusted one English writer who went to the colony especially to study the New Caledonian prison system. In his book, *In an Unknown Prison-land*, George Griffiths writes in shocked terms of the intolerable liberties allowed these 'bloodthirsty scoundrels.'

'I had gone to Noumea full up to the roots of my hair with the utterly erroneous notions which I had picked up from books and conversations. The books appear to have been written mostly by returned déportées or communards who had been banished in '71 and '72, and allowed to return to France after the general amnesty.' (Presumably these people couldn't be expected to know much about prison condition). 'Now that is what I actually saw of convict life before I had passed the prison gates for the first time. I had eaten my second dinner at the Cercle, and Lord Dunmore, taking pity on my isolation, said :

"The convict-band is playing in the square to-night ; suppose we go and get some seats ?"

"The convict what ?" I said, harking back mentally to the rigid English system, and trying to picture to myself an English convict playing a cornet.

"It's what they call here the *Musique de la Transportation*. It's quite an institution in Noumea. I don't suppose there's anything like it anywhere else."

'So I went, feeling verily a stranger in a strange land. It was an absolutely perfect tropical night... There were pretty costumes and brilliant uniforms, stars and medals and all the rest of it, and the one finishing tropical touch that was needful was added by the wandering bands of laughing Kanakas with gaudy waistcloths and fantastic headgear, big luminous eyes, and teeth that gleamed whitely as they laughed.

'Saving these last, there was nothing that would have

been incongruous with one of those delightful portions of outdoor Paris where "l'on s'amuse." The shadow of the Black Death (there was bubonic plague in Noumea at the time) seemed to have lifted for the time, and as for crime and convicts—well presently up one of the avenues through the flamboyants there appeared a line of grey-clad figures carrying musical instruments. There were 25 of them all told.

'They sauntered up to the band-stand laughing and chatting as though they hadn't a care in the wide world. Possibly they had very few; fewer certainly than the peasant toiling his sixteen hours a day for a bare living in far-away France.

'They were guarded by a very bored-looking surveillant, who carried in a sling a revolver which he was not allowed to use, unless one of his charges struck him first... There was a little tuning-up, then the conductor tapped his music-stand, waved his baton of authority, and forthwith the sweet strains of the 'Intermezzo' from *Cavalleria Rusticana* began to float out through the drowsy hush of the tropical evening.

'There is really only one word which could describe the scene, and that is bizarre... But in Noumea no one, save, perhaps, myself, looked twice at the enclosure which contained an amount of assorted villiany and potential violence, rapine and sudden death as you could find the wide world over in a similar space. There were men from every station of life—soldiers, priests, lawyers, politicians, financiers, and men who had once belonged to the Golden Youth of France—inside the kiosk of the Musique de la Transportation.

'Collectively they had committed every crime, from forgery to outrages for which civilized speech has no name.

The chef d'orchestre, for example, as the man who a few years ago, sent a thrill of horror through the world by cutting the heart out of a man whom he believed to be his rival in his wife's affections (this is a triumph of Victorian understatement seeing that Pitazy, the man in question, returned home from conducting an orchestral concert to find his wife in bed with the aforementioned man whom he "believed to

be his rival in his wife's affections"), getting her to cook it as a sheep's heart, dining off it with her, and then telling her what she had been eating. In addition to being a talented musician he was also a very clever painter who has won quite a reputation in the island.

'And yet, while this unspeakable scoundrel was controlling with his baton the flood of sweet sounds which flowed out from the kiosk over the moonlight-spangled lawns, the most respectable people in Noumea were sitting about in chairs smoking and chatting; young men and maidens were wandering about among the trees; and little children were playing round the grassy slope on which the bandstand stood, taking no more notice of these human hyenas than if they had been the most respectable musicians that ever wore long hair and swallow-tailed coats.

'When the performance was over the artists gathered up their instruments, lolled out on to the path in front of the kiosk and shuffled into a sort of double line. The weary warder counted them in a languid fashion, right about faced them and gave the order to march. They shambled away through the gaily-dressed crowds in the square. No one even turned to look at them, and I, who had seen a party of English convicts on their way to work through a public road, ranged up with their faces to the wall because a brake-load of excursionists was passing by, wondered greatly.

'The Musique de la Transportation is now, happily for the credit of Noumea, a thing of the past. The pampered artists got to think themselves indispensable to the gaiety of the town. So, one night, after having collected more surreptitious coppers than usual, they halted on their way to the barracks, bought wine and brandy, and told the warder to go and report them if he dared. He did dare, and the next day the Director of the Administration published a brief edict which abolished them as musicians for ever.'

Why this form of utilizing the convict talents should have been more abhorrent than any other is hard to explain. The convicts were playing for the entertainment of the populace, not for themselves. The Governor even made

use of the band at his official receptions—sparing his guests the necessity of gazing at these ‘human hyenas’ by screening them off from public view.

This disgusting exhibition of lack of severity seems, however, to have worried the author throughout his stay in the colony, and only on one or two occasions did he really feel that the ends of justice had properly been served. His description of a visit to Ile Nou is worth quoting, giving as it does the impressions of a man, expert in the subject of prisons, and their administration. After having been rowed across from the mainland to Ile Nou, the author lit his pipe and ‘strolled down to the quay to enjoy my strange surroundings.’

‘I had seen hundreds of convicts in England working both within and without the prison walls; working in grim joyless silence, surrounded by equally silent, rifle-armed warders and never a prisoner moving without one of these at his heels. Here it was difficult to believe that I was in Prison-land at all save that the other occupants of the quay were wearing two very different uniforms, and that I was the only one en civile. The surveillants were dressed in spotless white...the uniform of the others was chiefly conspicuous for its ugliness and utility... A good many of them were smoking and this rather got on my nerves, for I kept on asking myself what would happen to an English prison official if he saw a convict take out a cigarette and go and ask another one for a light? But here surveillants strolled about smoking their own cigarettes—making me wonder again what would happen to an English warder smoking on duty? and not worrying particularly over anything...Still the convicts worked hard and regularly; harder indeed than I have ever seen English convicts work.’

Eventually, however, even the author’s thirst for bigger and better punishment for these rascally scoundrels was satisfied when he arrived at the ‘Cachot Noir,’ the Black Cell.

‘Out of the corner of one came something in human shape, crouching forward, rubbing its eyes and blinking at the unaccustomed light. It had been three and a half years in

that horrible hole, about three yards long, by one and a half broad. I gave him a feast of sunshine and outer air by taking his place for a few minutes.

'After the first two or three the minutes lengthened into hours. I had absolutely no sense of sight. I was as blind as though I had been born without eyes. The blackness seemed to come down on me like some solid thing and drive my straining eyes back into my head. It was literally darkness that could be felt, for I felt it, and the silence was like the silence of upper space.

'When the double doors opened again, the rays of light seemed to strike my eyes like daggers. The criminal whose place I had taken had a record of infamy which no printable words could describe, and yet I confess I pitied him as he went back into that living death of darkness.'

The deportation to New Caledonia has long been abolished. —nearly fifty years ago, and if one wants to witness such punishment as Mr. Griffiths describes one must go to French Guiana or Devil's Island. To-day Ile Nou has been converted by Pan American Airways into a modern air base, replete with all the modern equipment for servicing the 'planes on their way to and from New Zealand and San Francisco. Ile des Pins, where most of the Communards were imprisoned, is a charming island visited by young couples on their honeymoon, and once or twice a year the object of a specially organized tourist excursion from the mainland. The Peninsula Ducos, the site of the third main penitentiary hasn't had as happy a fate as the other two—it now houses New Caledonia's leper colony.

The first time I heard the name Ducos was in 1936 when travelling *via* Noumea to Europe. Most French boats carry 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th class passengers, and on the boat on which I travelled there were four old Arabs in 4th class. Ragged and forlorn, they sat huddled together, hardly stirring except when the galley boy brought them their pots of stew and rice, or when it was time to scuffle off to bed. A few of the Australian passengers made a collection of clothes, old shirts and trousers that could be spared to

replace the rags that the old Arabs wore ; and as one of the few French-speaking travellers I was deputed to present the results of the collection to them.

They were very grateful and during many of the weary days between Noumea and Marseilles, I squatted with them on a pile of rope on the tarpaulin-covered hatches, and tried to 'prise out of them something of their life on the island. It appeared they belonged to the tribe of Kabyles, from Algeria, and fifty years earlier they had taken part in a revolt against the French. When the revolt was put down, the leaders were captured and sent to New Caledonia.

They told me that when they and their fellow-rebels arrived at Ducos, they met one of the most famous Arab leaders of his day, Abu-Mezrag-Mokrani, who at the head of 20,000 Arab warriors defied the French in the 1871 revolt of the Kabyle tribesmen. Later, when the 1878 revolt broke out among the New Caledonian natives, Abu and his compatriots were used to help put down the revolting tribesmen.

For fifty years these unfortunates had been in New Caledonia—most of the time imprisoned on the Presqu'île de Ducos, which was specially reserved for political prisoners. After they were released they had to wait a few more years while they worked and scraped and saved enough money to pay a fourth class fare back to Marseilles.

A few hours after landing in Marseilles, while walking down the famous Rue de la Cannebière, I sighted a small procession of figures ahead of me, all clad in flowing white burnouses. When they drew near, I was amazed to see that the central figures in the group, were the four old Arabs, looking very much the proud Arab sheiks that they probably were, before the New Caledonian convict prisons reduced them to the level of swindlers and pickpockets. It seemed that some of the head men of their tribe, well provided with money and clothes had made the trip across from Algiers, especially to welcome their compatriots after fifty years of exile.

There are not many of the old convicts left now. Deporta-

tion stopped in 1894—47 years ago, and as prisoners had to be at least twenty years of age before they could be sent to New Caledonia, the youngest of them is 67 years old now. The Sisters of Mercy provide a home for those who want it, but it is very hard for most of them to exchange the small liberties which they enjoy roaming the Noumean streets, for the restrictions of life within the four walls of a religious institution.

Most of them are well-known characters and can always rely on a few francs a day from former employers or workmates. One of the habitués of the place is 'Robert le Bourriquet' (Robert the little Donkey), a lean-faced haggard man, whose clothes droop loosely from his fleshless bones. The story is told that in former days he operated a transport service from the Bay des Pirogues on the East Coast, to the Anna Louise chrome mine. With a little donkey he laboriously made the 16 km. trip up a steep mountain from the Bay to the mine, a bag of flour slung across the donkey's back being the most frequent load. One day, to the amazement of the mine-workers, he staggered up to the mine with the 58 kg. (128 lbs.) bag of flour together with the diminutive donkey both slung across his shoulders. The donkey had jibbed, and rather than be beaten, he decided to carry both of them to the mine. He was immediately dubbed 'Le Bourriquet,' a name which has stuck to him ever since.

Then there is Henri Tartas—one of the unluckiest of the old 'bagnards'—who came within an ace of making a clean get-away from the island. For a few francs or a finger of rum at La Chaumière—one of Noumea's well-known bars—Henri Tartas is always willing to retell his tale. He modestly passes over the primary reason for his banishment to New Caledonia, and begins his story when he was working as a bootmaker in the penitentiary at Bourail.

The idea of escape came easy to the deportees and Tartas was apparently more imaginative than most. With half a dozen of his comrades in misfortune, a stolen whaleboat, provisioned with stolen food, and a naive trust in wind and

tide, Tartas set out in the vague hope of reaching Australia. The prevailing north-easterly wind carried the escapees on to the Great Barrier reef, where they nearly lost their boat—and lost their few remaining provisions and water supply.

After landing at the then uninhabited Pentecost Island, they drifted on to Whitsunday Island where they were looked after by the natives. Tartas dwells longingly on the excellence of the meal of dugong produced by the natives when they first landed at Whitsunday. Then one day they arranged with the captain of a trading lugger to take them across to Australia.

The captain, however, 'double-crossed' them, and as soon as he arrived at the Australian coast, sent for the police, who promptly arrested the escapees, and, on the demand of the New Caledonian authorities, returned them to serve an extra term of sentence in the prison colony. Tartas, however, was nothing if not persistent, and some years later he and some of his prison mates in a self-built boat set out for New Guinea, where they stayed for some time, prospected for and found gold, but after journeying to Australia to dispose of his New Guinea gold, Tartas was once more returned to New Caledonia.

All of those 'bagnards' have interesting tales to tell of the native revolts, for they were much in demand to help in their suppression, their diligence in shooting natives being rewarded by an appropriate remission of sentence. Much of the colourful history of the colony could be had by searching the memories of these forlorn figures, who contributed so much to the early development of the colony.

Of a very different calibre to the other habitués of the Place des Cocotiers is brown-moustached M. Georges Baudoux. M. Boudoux was one of the pioneers of the mining industry in the colony, and owned what was once the largest cobalt mine in the world. More important for posterity, he took wide and sympathetic interest in the natives, studied their habits and dialects, lived and worked with them, gaining their confidence and absorbing their folk-lore. In his book *Légendes Canaques* (Kanaka



folk-lore. In his book *Légendes Canaques* (Kanakan Legends) he has published a fine collection of the folk tales handed down from generation to generation by the native bards. M. Baudoux is one of the best authorities on Melanesian folk lore in the Pacific, and it is to be hoped he will be persuaded to leave a permanent record of some more of the endless fund of native stories that he has collected.

The Place des Cocotiers is a treasure-house of interesting characters whose stories, pieced together, would compile a voluminous and colourful history covering the last fifty years of the colony's existence.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONVICTS IN IRON CAGES

BEHIND the deportation of political 'undesirables' to New Caledonia lies the story of one of the most dramatic episodes in the whole frustrated history of the French nation.

The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War on July 19th, 1870, was the signal for a revival of a fierce French nationalism which was synonymous with republicanism. French intellectuals hailed the war as something sure to bring about the fall of Napoleon III and the re-introduction of the hard-fought-for Republic. They had fiercely combated Napoleon III's imperialism, and were certain that once the Prussians were defeated the Republic, which Napoleon had betrayed by seizing power in 1853, would come into being.

The war against the Prussians found those who had been foremost in opposing the Emperor in the vanguard opposing the Prussian armies, but in 1870 as in 1940 there were some in France who preferred to have the Prussian armies in Paris rather than let the people take charge of their own destinies.

The intellectual leader of those in opposition to Napoleon was the Marquis Henri de Rochefort-Lucay—an outstanding journalist of his day. Henri Rochefort, as he preferred to be called, had been living in exile in Brussels where he collaborated with Victor Hugo—also in exile, in producing *La Lanterne*, a Republican newspaper which was printed in half a dozen languages and distributed all over Europe—even, clandestinely, in France. Returning to Paris shortly before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, Rochefort was imprisoned for further attacks on Napoleon III in his newly-founded paper, *La Marseillaise*.

Another inflexible opponent of Napoleon was Louise Michel, the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy French liberal. She was one of the foremost woman revolutionaries of all

time, and the forerunner of Vera Figner in Russia, Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and Dolores Iribarra in Spain, as a champion of justice and women's rights.

As a school-teacher she was dismissed for refusing to acknowledge Napoleon after he had come to power in the coup d'état of 1853. Margaret Goldsmith, in her book *Seven Women Against The World*, quotes a satirical article which Louise Michel wrote against the Emperor, and which nearly landed her in gaol. The article caused a sensation in Paris.

'When Domitian reigned, he banished the philosophers and scholars from Rome. He increased the Pretorian Guard, re-established the games at the Capitol, and people adored the merciful Emperor while at the same time they hoped he would be stabbed to death. For some the apotheosis comes before, for others it comes afterwards. That is all. We are living in Rome in the year A.D. 95.'

As Napoleon had banished Victor Hugo, Rochefort and many other intellectuals, established a repressive political police force and was cordially hated, the article—seen as a thinly-veiled attack on the Emperor—was hailed with delight by the people, but caused Louise's immediate arrest. The Prefect of Police warned her that if she had been older she would have been sent to Cayenne, the convict prison in French Guiana, for daring to write such an article. Louise, with the wit and fire that was her chief characteristic, thereupon turned on the Prefect and told him that, if he dared suggest that the article referred to Napoleon, he would be rendering a grave insult to the Emperor, and she would see that he, the Prefect, was sent to Guiana. The Prefect was so dumbfounded that he released her with a caution.

To her, as to France's best intellectuals and writers of that time, Napoleon represented reaction, mediaeval tyranny—a return to a state of affairs to fight which the 1789 revolution had come into being. Republicanism meant the social revolution, a striving forward to progress, a concrete realization of the 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' of 1789.

The French armies were defeated at Sedan, and in September, 1870, the Emperor fled, and a republic was set up under Thiers. Rochefort was released from gaol and was immediately made a member of the new National Assembly, while Louis Gambetta was put in charge of the French armies. The Parisians soon became suspicious of Thiers, however, when they learned that he was secretly negotiating with the Prussians. Thiers, moreover, was antagonistic towards the armed National Guard, which the people had established, and which had sworn to defend Paris to the last.

Gambetta's hasty reorganization of the Imperial Armies was too late, and the Prussians swept on to the gates of Paris itself, and the famous siege of the capital commenced. Louise Michel had volunteered as an ambulance driver and was untiring in her efforts to succour the wounded—and preach resistance to the Prussians. The Thiers government was universally distrusted, and as a contemporary writer said, 'It was felt that the monarchy had not been overthrown, but only replaced by Thiers.'

Try as they could, the Prussians could make no impression on the defenders of Paris, and when it was rumoured that Thiers was negotiating an armistice, and to surrender the city, battalions of the National Guard, headed by Flourens, marched to the Town Hall, demanding that no armistice be signed. The Republicans were convinced that only by resisting the Prussians could the Republic be saved—and they were prepared to resist to the last man. Thiers had the leaders of this demonstration arrested, and shortly afterwards he surrendered Paris. The Franco-Prussian War was over.

The Imperial Army was disarmed and the troops made prisoners of war. The National Guard, however, refused to give up its arms, and whether the Prussians despised them as untrained, un-uniformed rabble, or whether they respected them for their heroic defence of the capital, they didn't force them to disarm. The Thiers government, however, determined not to have its authority challenged by the people's National Guard, sent its troops to crush them.

The astonishing result was a decisive victory for the 'untrained rabble,' who routed the Imperial troops at Montmartre. Thiers and his assembly fled to Versailles, and the victorious National Guard set up the Paris Commune.

The reaction of Paris to the defeats and betrayals of 1870 must have played a large part in influencing the French rulers of 1940 not to defend the city, when Hitler's troops were on the march.

The proclamation establishing the Commune read as follows: 'The working people of Paris, in the midst of the defeats and betrayals of the ruling class, have realized that they must save the situation by taking the conduct of public affairs into their own hands... They have realized that it is their highest duty and their absolute right to make themselves masters of their own fates and to seize the power of the government.'

While the Central Committee of the National Guard established the government of the Commune at Paris, the Provisional Government of Thiers was set up at Versailles, where negotiations took place with the Prussians for the partition of France. Rochefort and a handful of deputies—as were Blum, Mandel, Herriot and a few others seventy years later—were opposed to any concessions to the Prussians and any dismemberment of France. They resigned from the National Assembly rather than be party to the carving up of their country, and announced their support for the Commune.

The Commune, incidentally, had nothing to do with Communists—the French Communists Party was not founded till 1921—but got its name from the government set up in the Commune, or municipality of Paris. The principal demand was for autonomy of the Commune of Paris, and the Communards counted such famous names as Gustave Courbet the artist, Hugo the writer, and Clemenceau the future statesman among their ranks.

It is interesting to note some of the measures introduced during its brief two months of power.

Firstly, the old imperial armies were dissolved and all those capable of bearing arms were expected to join the

People's Army or National Guard. All rents due during the time of the Franco-Prussian War were cancelled, and those that had been paid, were placed to the credit of future payments. The pawn-brokers were made to return the pledges of poor people, and pawn-shops were abolished as 'being incompatible with the rights of workers to their tools and their credit.'

The Commune was enthusiastically acclaimed as the first world republic, and non-French residents in Paris were accorded the same rights as French people. Salaries of even the highest functionaries were fixed at not more than 6,000 francs per annum. Secular education was introduced and separation of State and church established. Religious properties were confiscated and State subsidies to religious institutions stopped. Factories which had been abandoned by their owners, or which for some reason or another were not working, were registered, and plans drawn up for them to be operated by the workers themselves, with one great co-operative organization to control the whole production and distribution of goods. Private labour exchanges were abolished ;to obtain employment simply entailed registering with the local municipal authorities.

From the first, Louise Michel was an active participant in the Commune. She bore a rifle in the 61st battalion of the National Guard, and threw herself wholeheartedly into the reorganizational work that the social revolution made necessary.

For seventy-two days the Commune held out against repeated attempts by Thiers to crush it. Time and again troops were sent against the National Guard, and time and again they turned the butts of their rifles towards the People's Army, fraternized with them, and went over to the Communards. There could be but one end, however. Thiers planned a regular campaign and organized a 'Fifth Column' within the city to help smash the resistance. Using provincial troops, he instructed them to pretend to go over to the Communards, with the butts of their rifles turned to the

National Guard, and when they got near enough, to fire on the defenders.

The end of Paris Commune came at the cemetery at Montmartre, where the National Guard was finally crushed. Even when the troops were beaten, Thiers wasn't satisfied. Extermination of the Communards was the order of the day. Men, women and children were ruthlessly massacred—25,000 of them at Montmartre alone—before Thiers called a halt.

Meanwhile, Henri Rochefort, who had taken an active part in the last days of the Commune, was arrested. Thiers had posted up on the walls of houses and public buildings proclamations announcing the dissolution of the Commune, terminating with the statement, 'The leaders of the Commune have fled. M. Henri Rochefort has been arrested.' Rochefort, in his autobiography, claims however, that to identify him as a leader of the Commune was too much of an honour as he played a minor role compared with other Communards.

Louise Michel, who had fought at the barricades till the last, was able to elude the musket balls and bayonets of the final massacre, but her relief at escape turned to despair when she learned that her mother had been arrested as hostage for herself. She gave herself up immediately to secure her mother's release. She was taken to the Sartory Prison and later to Versailles for trial. She fully expected the death sentence, and during her trial her attitude was fearless and uncompromising. 'I do not wish to defend myself,' she declaimed. 'I do not wish any one else to defend me. I belong entirely to the social revolution and I accept full responsibility for everything I have done. I accept this responsibility without restriction... If you let me live, I shall never cease to shout vengeance on you who have killed my brothers...'

Her sentence was transportation to New Caledonia for life. Rochefort also escaped the fate of Ferré and the other leaders who were executed; he was sentenced to life imprisonment in New Caledonia.

Chained in iron cages, treated more like wild beasts than human beings, Louise Michel and Henri Rochefort, together with some thousands of other Communards—all those in fact that escaped the massacre in Montmartre cemetery and execution later—were deported to New Caledonia. Louise and Rochefort were both on the same boat, and had the small pleasure of exchanging greetings now and again between the iron grilles of their respective cages.

One can imagine the awful experience of those unfortunate people, confined in a small space, without proper sanitation or even ventilation, enduring seven months before they finally landed in New Caledonia. When one of the transports arrived at Melbourne more than half of the deportees were down with scurvy, and although the working people of Melbourne collected £1,500 in a short time to relieve their distress, they were not allowed to help. Many died during the voyage and Rochefort himself never expected to see land again. Although, because of his rank, he was later given a special cabin, he was terribly ill for most of the voyage, and he and many others bemoaned the fact that they had escaped execution only to meet a worse fate.

The Communards were segregated from the common criminals and most of them were established on the Ile des Pins—not on the humanitarian grounds that they shouldn't be mixed up with the other convicts, but because there was less chance of escape from Ile des Pins. The more dangerous of the prisoners, including Rochefort and Louise Michel were confined on the Ducos Peninsula, near Noumea.

Apparently life on the Ile des Pins wasn't too bad as far as material matters were concerned, but the very fact that these people, most of whom had been intellectually active all their lives, should now be cut off from all contact with the outside world, with the memories of their friends and comrades massacred, and the bitter sweet of the near success of their revolution, was the most terrible punishment that could have been inflicted.

According to my friend M. Calimbre whose father had closer contact than most people with the Communards on



Ile des Pins, the colony was well conducted, and the prisoners allowed a deal more liberty than the ordinary convicts. It wasn't very long before they had a couple of newspapers in circulation, and they even organized a theatre, which, naturally enough, was very well patronized.

On the Ducos Peninsula, Louise Michel and Henri Rochefort were Numbers 1 and 2 prisoners respectively, and the authorities stood a good deal in awe of them. Louise Michel devoted her time mainly to caring for the other deportees. She soon earned the title of 'La Bonne Louise,' used later by her biographers. Happy that her service in an ambulance corps in the war against the Prussians had given her a knowledge of medicine, she acted as doctor and nurse to the colony. Her training as schoolteacher fitted her to teach the children of the other prisoners, and in her spare time she studied botany and the folk lore of the Melanesian natives—about which she later wrote a book.

Rochefort has some trite remarks regarding the colony in his book of memoirs. 'The English, who are as clever at colonizing as we are unskilful, occupied New Caledonia for some time, after its discovery by Captain Cook; then, having cut the stumps of the sandal-wood trees—the only valuable product of the country—they abandoned it to us, knowing that if they couldn't get anything out of it, we should certainly be unable to do so.' (Rochefort could hardly be expected to know of the immense riches that lay buried under the barren-looking blue mountains of the mainland).

'The goddess of the island is a horrible variety of bat called roussette,' he continues (apparently the first time Rochefort had encountered the flying fox, which is eaten with such pleasure by the New Caledonians) 'which the Kanakas regard as a sacred animal. The red hair of these beasts, plaited like the meshes of human hair seen in coiffeurs' windows, is used to decorate the necks and shoulders of the "popinées" of the aristocracy.

'Beyond the fishing, which was rarely productive, our sole distraction took the form of swimming parties that lasted from 8 till 12.' One can imagine how the author of *In An*

*Unknown Prison-Land* must have twitched his moustache in dismay when he heard of these intolerable liberties allowed the Communards. He would have been heartened no doubt by Rochefort's description of what he heard from Ile Nou.

Rochefort writes that every Wednesday, about 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning, the Communards heard a terrible yelling and screaming drifting across the water from Ile Nou. The warders were applying the regulation bastinados to the convicts. These unfortunates were stripped to the loins and tied down to a bench while the 'corrector,' a gigantic mulatto, belaboured them with a whip of bullock sinews. The 'corrector's' energy depended on the size of the coin which the victim was able to slip into his hand before the punishment commenced.

It was through the efforts of Rochefort and a few other Communards that these whippings eventually were discontinued. Pamphlets and articles written by these people when they returned to Europe aroused public opinion to such an extent that the government had to forbid further lashings. Unfortunately they substituted the 'cachot noir,' which, as described in the preceding chapter, was even worse.

Rochefort also writes of a band called the 'Terrors,' who exercised considerable influence on Ile Nou. 'Some of the convicts on Ile Nou were relatively happy. The "Terrors" were a squadron of bandits fearing nothing, holding the whole personnel of the convict station under their domination, especially the warders... The guards and the unmanageable element have a sort of tacit arrangement by virtue of which they mutually spare one another. The terrorized pay tribute to the "Terrors."'

Henri Rochefort, from the time he left Marseilles, had only one thought in his mind—to escape and throw himself once more into political activity in Europe. Already on the voyage out he had contemplated swimming across to Las Palmas while *La Virginie* was anchored in the harbour, but he knew that the Spanish authorities would have handed him back to the French.

From a map which he obtained from the ship's library during the voyage, he marked down a small rock off the Ducos peninsula, which might one day serve as a point of departure for an attempted flight.

There were several attempts made by Communards to escape. Once a group of 15 succeeded in getting away from the mainland, complete with trunks and baggage. Unfortunately they had hardly cleared the shallow waters when the boat split in halves, and they returned in a very bedraggled and frustrated state.

Then one day there arrived on the Presqu'île Ducos an old companion of Rochefort's Paris days—Bastian Grandthille. He also had been deported, but, considered less dangerous, he had been transferred from Ile des Pins to Noumea, where he was employed by Dusser, a provision merchant, who supplied food and wine to the Ducos community. With Grandthille to act as a contact between the community and the outside world, Rochefort began to make plans for his escape.

Grandthille was asked to approach an American, or preferably an English, captain in port at Noumea and offer him anything from 10,000 to 100,000 francs for taking five or six of the Communards away on the next voyage.

Rochefort relates in his memoirs how he and his friend Pain climbed every day to the top of a mountain from where they could see the masts of the vessels in Noumea—wondering if they would ever have the luck to get aboard one of them. One day Grandthille came back, ostensibly to bring a supply of fruit and vegetables, but actually to bring the important news that he had contacted a certain Captain Low, captain of an Australian boat which brought coal across from Newcastle to Noumea. Low, by a fortunate chance, knew about Rochefort, and when Grandthille approached him he was actually sitting in his cabin with a copy of the English magazine *Bowbells*, reading about Rochefort and the Communards. He sympathized with the plight of the political deportees and without any discussion agreed to take five of them for 10,000 francs to Newcastle on his boat, the

*P.C.E.* He didn't want any money in advance, Rochefort's promise to pay was sufficient for him.

There were many difficulties to be overcome. First of all there was the problem of getting from Peninsula Ducos to Noumea. This was solved by Grandthille offering to bring his employer's boat to the little rock that Rochefort had observed on his chart. The Australian boat was to remain another week in harbour, and meanwhile Rochefort and his intimates completed their plans. It was decided that Pain, Grousset—Foreign Affairs delegate in the Commune, who later made the French translation of *Treasure Island*—Humbert, editor of the *Père Duchêne*, and Jourde, Finance Minister of the Commune, should accompany Rochefort.

Four days before the escape was to take place a young official from the Director of Transportation at Noumea came over to see Rochefort, offering to help him get free from the island, protesting that Rochefort was not the type of man that should waste away in a convict settlement. Rochefort was suspicious, however, that this was a trap to make him disclose his plans, and answered, 'Thank you, but my desire is to return to France by the front door which amnesty will throw wide open.'

One night Grousset received a letter from Jourde, also at Noumea—'To-morrow, Thursday, I will send you the eighth volume of the *Histoire du Consulat de L'Empire* as promised,' and the word was passed round that they must be ready on the rock at 8 o'clock the following day, Thursday. Pain and Rochefort had a trial swim to the rock that night, plying their warder with rum and making him drunk, so that their absence might not be noticed.

Thursday dawned, a rough, stormy day, with high seas washing over the top of the rock. At 10 a.m. Pain came to Rochefort with a piece of awkward news. A girl with whom the latter had been friendly had come over to Peninsula Ducos to spend a couple of days with her parents, and Rochefort was invited to spend the evening with them. Pain was sent back to tell the girl that Rochefort was deeply

offended because she had trifled with him, and he never wanted to see her again. Eventually Pain was able to persuade her that it was better to give up thoughts of seeing Rochefort for at least a few days.

No sooner was this difficulty overcome than another arose. Dusser, the provision merchant, arrived on the island with the boat that Grandthille reckoned on stealing that evening. Dusser had brought a load of provisions over, including drinks, and settled down as if to stay the whole afternoon. By 4 p.m. Rochefort and his friends began to get frantic, especially as the storm was coming up again. If they didn't get Dusser back to Noumea quickly, he would have to stay the night, Grandthille would not be able to bring them a boat, and the *P.C.E.* would sail without them.

Rochefort pointed out to Dusser that a storm was in the offing, the sea was rising, and if he didn't hurry back to Noumea he might be stranded at Ducos for a couple of days. Rochefort and his friends even accompanied the provision merchant to the shore to make certain that he got away safely. During the whole afternoon they had taken advantage of Dusser's presence to fill the warder with rum again, and he was in a fair way to being drunk when they left him to accompany Dusser to the boat. They hid among the bushes to wait for night fall, fairly certain that the warder wouldn't worry about them. By 8 p.m. the night was pitch black and the sea high. They set out for the rock—and Rochefort congratulated himself that he had memorized the spot so well, for with the blackness of the night, and the high seas, it would have been impossible to find it if its exact location hadn't been fixed in his mind.

They arrived at the rock safely, but there was no sign of any boat. They peered into the darkness and strained their ears to catch any sound of rowlocks above the roaring of the wind. Nothing. Only the light from five gas jets in front of the prison at Ile Nou. Then one of the lights disappeared, appeared again, the next one disappeared, and they knew that some shape was passing between them and the lights. A few minutes later the opaque shape of a boat

passed them, and Grandthille's voice was heard calling to them to swim across and clamber aboard.

They set out for Noumea again to where the *P.C.E.* was waiting for them. Coming alongside the ship that was to take them to liberty, they scrambled up a waiting rope ladder and to their dismay heard scraps of conversation in the purest of French. Back down the ladder they slid into their rowing boat. They had landed on the Government's despatch boat. Their next effort was more successful, and as Notre Dame de Noumea struck midnight, they dropped over the sides of the *P.C.E.*

Captain Low was ashore making a final round of Noumea's bars before leaving. Just as the six fugitives were getting into an awkward situation with the boat's steward, who knew nothing of the arrangements, Low appeared and, after sinking their boat, led the fugitives to their quarters—among the cargo in the hold. It is interesting to note that Rochefort later compensated Dusser for the loss of his whaleboat.

The next morning was dead calm, and while the authorities on Ducos were searching high and low for the escapees, the *P.C.E.* lay becalmed in Noumea harbour. Orders were given to search every ship in the harbour, but before they had time to search the *P.C.E.* there was sufficient breeze to float the schooner outside territorial waters—and the escapees, as political prisoners, were beyond the reach of French law.

Rochefort and his five companions were duly discovered in the hold and brought before the Captain, who lined them up on deck before the assembled crew and gave them the regulation lecture that one gives to stowaways, then led them to his cabin and gave them the first meal they had eaten in liberty for three years.

Rochefort writes of his and his companions' impressions of Australia. The first thing that struck them was that people were not in uniform, and that there was a complete lack of formality.

'In our beautiful country,' he writes, 'we should have been arrested, searched and thrown into the nearest prison as pirates and slaves. Three "juges d'instruction" would have

been appointed to examine us concerning our family history and on the subject of any notes the police might collect. The young Customs official simply said to the Captain :

“Do these gentlemen owe you nothing ?”

“Nothing at all. They have paid their passages.”

“In that case we have nothing against them” and the escapees were set ashore—free men.

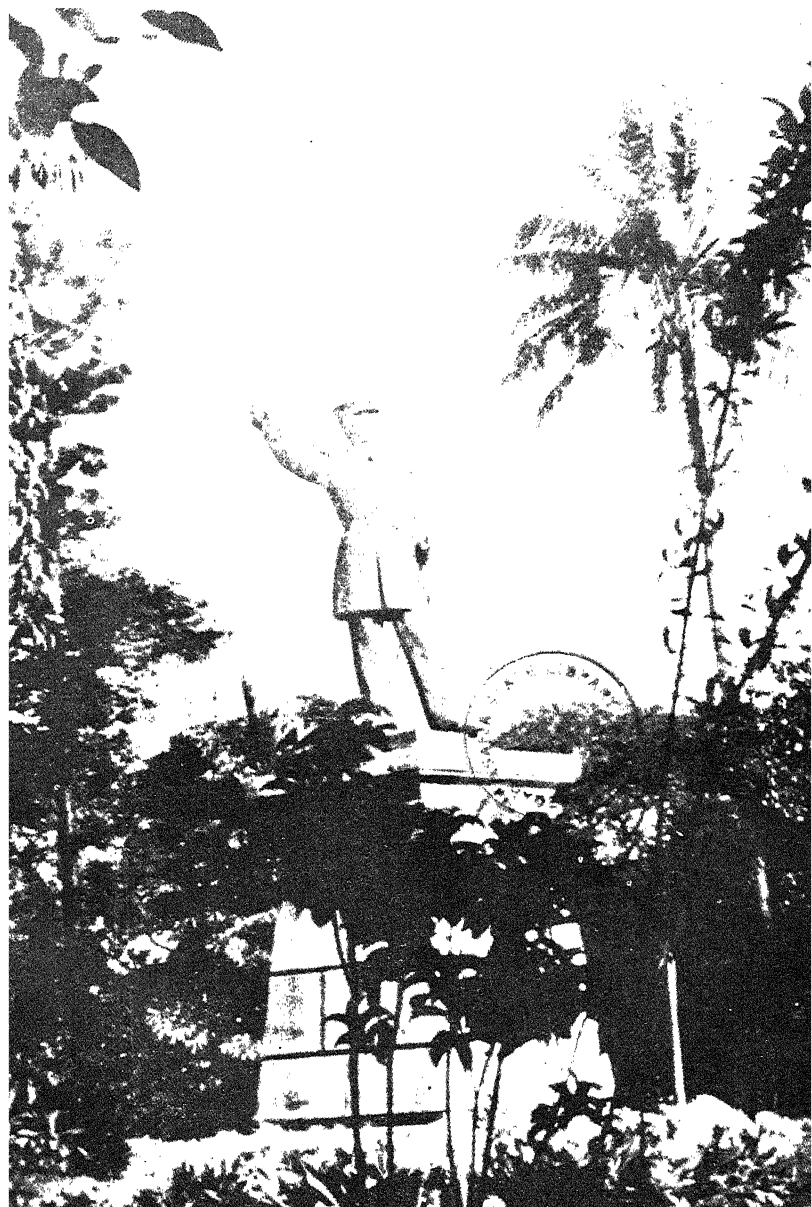
During his fortnight's stay in Australia, before proceeding to America, Rochefort came to the conclusion that here at last was a land of true liberty and equality, where master and man met on equal terms.

Rochefort was not the only one of the deportees to be struck by the progressiveness and liberalism of Australia. There is a most interesting sequel to the Communards' deportation days mentioned in Egon Kisch's book *Australian Landfall*.

At a reception given to Kisch in Perth, Western Australia, an old white-haired man drew Kisch aside, and asked him if he had ever heard of the Paris Commune. Kisch answered emphatically ‘Yes,’ whereupon the old man reverently took a red flag-cloth from a box : ‘Commune de Paris 1871. Liberté, Fraternité, Egalité ou la mort.’ The story of how he came by the flag is best told by Kisch himself.

‘A thousand francs and amnesty was promised publicly by General Gallifet after the Paris Commune had been overthrown, to everyone who could produce one of these rebel flags, so much was he afraid of its resurrection. He did not get every one of them into his claws. And sixty-four years later, on the other side of the globe, I see a flag of the Paris Commune preserved and tended with pride. The old man tells his story, the story of the flag. He is called Roger Grenier. His father, Pierre Grenier, was sentenced to death as a Communard, and afterwards reprieved for life-long deportation to New Caledonia. At that time Roger was barely ten years old.

‘Underhand persecution was added to the misery which the family suffered, deprived of their breadwinner. In his revenge the—up till then—“bloodiest of all Adolfs,”







the "monstrous gnome" Thiers, spared neither widow nor orphan, neither old woman nor child; his journaillles celebrated devil's mass against the "brood of brigands," nobody would give them lodging. Wherever they found a hidden place to stay, pimps and spies appeared. At last the families of the deported men were allowed to follow their fathers and husbands to New Caledonia.

'Six hundred women and children on the frigate *Ténélon*. With them little Roger sailed over the great sea. Around his small body he concealed the flag-cloth. Before the gaolers came, his father had told him to guard the flag safely, and the boy had guarded it safely in Paris, where so many enemies and "friends" had asked for it, and on the ship, too, where they lay pressed together between decks, where even one's most intimate toilet had to be performed publicly under the eyes of the spies that patrolled everywhere.

'When the *Ténélon* dropped anchor in Port Jackson in 1873 on its voyage to the dungeon island, these submerged victims of the power-drunk toady Adolphe Thiers experienced something which they had not expected—demonstrations of love and solidarity.

'Hundreds of Australian workers came down to the ships with flowers and presents and invitations, and the sons and daughters saw that they were being honoured for the sake of their fathers, the fathers for whose sake they had been persecuted until now. A banquet was arranged in Sydney Town Hall, and every Australian democrat, during the two days which the ship lay in the harbour, sought personally to entertain at least one family whose father had fought for freedom.

'What wonder then that little Roger Grenier came to love the country which embraced him and his dear ones so warmly. Here I want to live, he decided, but first the voyage must go on, towards the Archipelago of the deported men. Father Grenier kissed his brave boy and when secretly he showed his fellow-prisoners the flag under which they had fought, their eyes grew moist. The imprisonment on New Caledonia lasted sixteen years, then came the full amnesty.

Pierre Grenier returned to Paris, but Roger disembarked on the way and remained in Australia, the land in which he had as a child determined to live. With him remained the flag. Even to-day, Roger Grenier feels himself a son of the Paris Commune, and his daughter and her daughter, who came with him to the meeting, must show how well they speak French. "I am a Labour Party man, but my children stand closer to you comrade," he says, while with tender gesture he folds the flag.'

After Henri Rochefort's escape, Louise Michel had many long years to put in on the Ducos Peninsula, and her untiring work among the prisoners earned her even a grudging tribute from the author of *In An Unknown Prison-Land*. '...Here lived Louise Michel, the Arch-priestess of Anarchism, devoting herself to the care of the sick and suffering with a self-sacrifice which rivalled even that of the Sisters of Mercy.'

It was not until 1880 that a general amnesty freed Louise Michel and those Communards who survived the nine years of prison and deportation.

Although the rest of their story doesn't concern New Caledonia, it would be a pity to leave Louise and Rochefort with their departure from New Caledonia. Their subsequent careers in France were a tribute to their strong convictions. If the Paris authorities believed that the nine years imprisonment would break their spirits or dim their ardor, they were quickly to be disabused. Louise's words at her trial were no idle boast: 'If you let me live I shall not cease calling for vengeance, and I shall denounce to the vengeance of my brothers the murderers of the Commission for Pardons...'

From the day of her arrival back in France she continued her activities as if she had never been interrupted, except that it was noted she had gained new passion and conviction during her exile. In 1883, she led a demonstration of starving hunger marchers demanding bread for their empty stomachs. Because of a riot, which she alleged was instigated by 'agents provocateurs,' she was again arrested and sentenced to six years' prison. A model prisoner, she taught her

companions dressmaking, and those who were illiterate she taught to read and write. Released again in 1886, she was re-arrested in 1890 for leading a demonstration at Vicenne. This time the authorities thought to discredit her once and for all. Before she came up for trial she was given a drink, which contained powerful spirits. It was the first time in her life that she had tasted alcohol, and she was led into the court half tipsy. The judge tried to have her certified insane and committed to an asylum, but the plan failed.

After that she left for London—on the advice of her friends—returning to France to conduct lecture tours. At 75 she was still active enough to be a powerful and popular lecturer, and was actually engaged on a lecture tour, when she took ill and died at Marseilles in 1905, after one of the most exciting careers of any woman in history.

Nor was Rochefort any less active after his return. Up till the time of amnesty, he fought through the press and on the platform to have his companions in New Caledonia released. In America and England he stirred up public conscience against the inhuman practices in the convict prisons. After the amnesty, he returned to Paris and founded the Radical paper *L'Intransigeant*, which was still in existence until the Germans marched into Paris again in 1940. His forthright criticism against the Government brought him into prison again in 1889.

When he was released from prison in 1895, he found France torn from top to bottom over the Dreyfus case. Immediately he plunged into the fight to secure justice for the wrongly imprisoned Jewish captain, and with Emile Zola carried on an unending campaign until Dreyfus was released. One can imagine with what conviction he fought, firstly against the injustice of Dreyfus's conviction, and secondly against the inhuman and bestial conditions rampant in the Devil's Island colony, which was even worse than that at New Caledonia.

As editor of *La Patrie*, Rochefort was able to spend his later days in more or less quiet. When he died in 1913 at the age of 83, France lost one of her greatest and most

colourful figures. The Marquis Henri-Victor de Rochefort-Lucay and Louise Michel could both have lived sheltered and peaceful lives if they had cared to remain blind to the injustices rampant in the age in which they lived.

One thing is certain—that New Caledonia has suffered nothing for having been the 'dumping-ground' for such people. Because the Old World rejected—or ejected—many of the finest spirits of the age, the New World bordering the Pacific has a virile, liberty-loving ancestry which is directly responsible for their independence and lack of subservience to privilege.

The Communards in New Caledonia, the Chartists and Irish Nationalists in Australia, the Pilgrim Fathers and the long line of political refugees who for centuries past have sought sanctuary in America, have helped to establish a new tradition of liberty and tolerance.

## NATIVE REVOLTS AND CONSEQUENCES

'I GUESS Sydney must have changed a lot since I was there last. It was noisy, you know,' and two wrinkled brown hands lifted an apron up in horror at the memory, and a sturdy round body in a cane chair rocked in sympathy with the hands.

'You know, it must be over sixty years now since I was there. As a matter of fact, it was in 1879. I remember because I went over to Emily's wedding.'

'I suppose travelling wasn't so comfortable in those days?'

'Oh, yes. It was very comfortable. I went in father's lugger. You've heard of the *Black Dog*, haven't you?'

Of course I had heard of the *Black Dog*, one of the famous luggers which traded across to Sydney eighty years ago.

I was fortunate enough to have discovered the most interesting personality in New Caledonia, and one of the most interesting in all the South Seas. The 82-year-old lady with whom I was speaking is the daughter of the first white settler in New Caledonia—John Paddon. Those twinkling brown eyes had witnessed much of the history of the colony. She was born only five years after the French took possession of the island, and was six years old when the sailing ship *Iphigénie* dropped anchor in Noumea harbour, with most of the contents of Toulon prison on board.

Paddon was an adventurous English sailor who drifted across to the South Seas. After having unsuccessfully tried to form a trading post in the Loyalty Islands—where he met the mother of my hostess—he settled down on Aneityum, the most southerly of the New Hebridean Islands, noted for its forests of sandalwood and kauri. Together with a number of other European employees who manned his few luggers, he began to build up a trade with the natives, in the surrounding islands, trading axes, arms, prints, cotton, mirrors, any

trifles he could buy in Sydney for sandalwood, bêche-de-mer, pearl shell, coconuts, etc.

As his trade grew, he wanted a depot nearer Sydney, so shifted his establishment over to Ile Nou, known in those days as Ile Bouzet. In 1845, eight years before the French took possession of New Caledonia, Paddon had an extensive self-supporting community established on Ile Nou, with about sixty Europeans, and 200 natives working for him.

'I suppose you don't remember much about Ile Nou?' I asked.

'No. Papa had sold that before I was born.'

'Did he get on well with the French?'

'Oh, yes. They used to always come and ask his advice, you know, when they first came here. And then once Papa heard that the natives were planning to kill off the French in Noumea, and he paddled across and warned the Governor. They liked him all right. But once, you know, he was frightened of them. One day, the Governor sent a message to Papa, and said he must come immediately to Noumea. And Papa was so frightened he jumped in a canoe and went all the way to Australia in the canoe.'

'Why on earth did he do that?'

'Well, I don't know. I wasn't even born then. But they said he had been selling guns to the natives. Afterwards, though, the Governor specially invited him back, and said he would give him a lot of land at Paita, if Papa would let the government have Ile Nou. So Papa came back, and they gave him beautiful land at Paita and 60,000 francs as well.'

'And what happened to all his men?'

'They all settled down. There were about sixty of them altogether, Germans, Irish, Swedes, all sorts. Some went away back to Europe, others got grants of land from the French, and their children are still here on the island.'

'It couldn't have been very nice for you living here in those days, with a lot of convicts?' I suggested.

'But why not? They were all right. Most of them only hadn't had a chance where they lived in Europe. There was hardly any crime here, because everyone could get enough

to eat and had something to do. All our servants were convicts and we never had any trouble with them. They did all the work here at first. Some of them—especially the Communards—were good tradesmen. These chairs we are sitting on were made by them. And all the furniture inside was made by the Communards at Ile des Pins.’ And the old lady led the way in from the garden where we had been sitting to show me the beautiful cupboards and chests made by the convict cabinet-makers.

‘Even these lace curtains were made by women deportees. Poor things, most of them were more sinned against than sinners. Most of them were unmarried mothers who had killed their babies. They’d have done better if they’d deported the men that got them into bother.’

‘Do you remember much about the native revolts?’

‘I remember very well when they murdered some settlers over at Mont D’Or. We heard the drums beating for days before. Then we could see from Noumea the smoke, and even see the natives dancing about on the shore, after they killed the police, too. They had to send over a whole regiment of soldiers to punish them.

‘But another time I was nearly caught myself. That was in 1878, when the big revolt broke out. A friend and I were riding on horseback near Boulouparis, when we heard a terrible shouting and yelling, and there, swarming up the sides of the valley, were dozens of Kanakas, horribly painted and with spears and axes in their hands. They were screaming and roaring as they clambered up after us. We belted our horses, and what with our shouting and the yelling of the natives, they nearly went mad with fright. The natives were trying to head us off at a narrow part of the road, but they weren’t quick enough. It’s a good thing they didn’t have guns like most of them had. They threw their spears and stones at us, but we got safely to the main road, and hardly stopped galloping till we got back to Noumea. We heard then that the natives had been murdering people everywhere and that the authorities had rounded up all the Noumean natives and interned them.’



The 1878 native revolt was no light affair. That the natives had been able to organize a spontaneous rising of tribes throughout the colony was something totally unexpected, and after the revolt was quelled measures were taken at last to get to the bottom of the reasons for the frequent uprisings against the colonists.

On June 19th, 1878, news reached Noumea that a libéré (freed convict) named Chene, living about 80 kms. from Noumea, had been assassinated on his farm, together with his two children and their native mother. As Chene had stolen his 'popinée' from a local chief, and as it was a member of her tribe who had killed the couple, it was believed to be an isolated assassination, with revenge as the motive.

A few days later, on June 24th and 25th, Noumea was shocked to learn that all the soldiers at the La Foa gendarmerie had been wiped out, together with seventeen other people. Governor Olry, who for weeks past had been suspicious about certain of the tribes, who had been laying in stocks of weapons, realized that he was faced by a planned revolt, which had as its aim the expulsion of the whites from the colony. For the next few days reports arrived of further massacres along the West Coast, at Boulouparis, where practically the entire population was wiped out, and at other smaller villages. On the 'black' 26th of June no fewer than 84 people were murdered, in places as far apart as Boulouparis on the West Coast and Thio and Canala on the East Coast.

The natives went about their work in an intelligent manner. Both at La Foa and at Boulouparis, it was the gendarmes and telegraph operators who were first assassinated—and the telegraph communications with the capital severed—the colonists were isolated and massacred methodically. In some cases the attacks were carried out by bands of several hundreds of natives armed with guns. In other cases colonists were killed in their beds, their heads smashed in with a blow from a 'casse-tête' (literally a head-breaker, the favourite club-like weapon of the Kanakas). Usually the bodies of those killed were mutilated.

Governor Olry began to organize punitive and defensive expeditions after taking due precautions with the Noumean Kanakas. There were rumours that the tribes from Mont D'Or—only a few kilometres from Noumea—were preparing to join with the other revolting tribes in a march on the capital. Colonists and convicts alike were enlisted in a defence corps. Even the Kybale chieftain, Abu-Mezrag, who himself had led an Arab revolt against the French seven years earlier, was brought from his place of exile at Ducos to lead a detachment of Arab convicts against the rebellious natives.

Clovis Savoie, in his *Histoire de la Nouvelle Calédonie*, describes what may well have been the decisive factor in turning the campaign in favour of the whites. A lieutenant in the French Navy, Servan, asked and received permission to try and organize the natives of Canala on the East Coast to come to the help of the whites. The Canala chiefs had practically decided to throw in their lot with the rebels, when Servan appealed for their help. The Grand Chief Gelima who, according to Savoie, had no wish for revenge against the whites, sided with Servan. Kaké the political chief was undecided what to do, while Nondo, the military leader, was definitely in favour of joining the rebels. Servan, pretending that he never doubted their loyalty, asked them to assemble at 8 o'clock that evening, ready to march against the rebel chief Atai.

The three chiefs, together with 400 Kanakas armed and in full war dress, arrived, undecided what they were going to do. Servan allowed them some time to think things over, and then demanded that they should set out immediately to relieve the colonists at Ourail, who were at that moment engaged in a pitched battle with the natives. For a few moments there was tension, and then there was excitement amongst the natives as the hostile Nondo moved towards Servan, obviously to kill him. When Nondo got close enough, Servan held out his rifle to him, saying :

'Nondo, I give you my rifle.'

'To me ?' stammered the surprised warrior.

‘Yes. If you fight together with me and the other soldiers down there at Ourail, you can have my rifle as a present. If on the contrary you kill me—as you seem to intend—you at least won’t be able to boast that you took my rifle from me.’

There were deep ‘Hmms’ of admiration from the crowd, and Nondo, reddening with pleasure, took the rifle. He shook hands with Servan, and pledged the support of his tribesmen in helping to crush the rebels. More than 200 of them actually crossed the island to Ourail, with Servan at their head, and under Nondo, Kaké and Gelima played a large part in quelling the insurrection.

As news kept coming in to Noumea, and refugee women and children began arriving at the capital with terrible tales of atrocities wreaked on white people—or natives in the service of whites—panic began to seize the people of Noumea. The rebel natives reached Toughoué, only 12 kms. from the capital, killing, burning and pillaging as they came. The military commander of the colony, Colonel Gally-Passebosc, had been killed in ambush on the road between Ourail and Boulouparis.

At a meeting in Noumea it was decided to form small mounted groups of twenty men each, to clear the rebels back from the Noumea district, while further contingents were sent in coastal cutters to land at various points along the West Coast.

Colonel Wendling was appointed in place of Gally-Passebosc and a planned campaign was instituted against the natives. The fighting now developed into guerilla warfare. As soon as the rebels were crushed in one spot, the remainder withdrew to the mountains, and within a few days the revolt would break out elsewhere. For months the campaign went on, the French destroying native villages and burning the cultivation fields, the natives withdrawing to the north, burning homes and stations, massacring the inmates and arming themselves with their weapons. By September the revolt had spread as far as Poya, 220 kms. from Noumea. Most of the colonists there were massacred.

It was not until April, 1879, after nine months of bitter fighting that colonists were able to return to their holdings and on June 3rd, after almost a year of warfare, the revolt was officially declared finished, with the raising of the state of siege from Bourail, Ourail and Boulouparis. This 1878 revolt did an immeasurable amount of harm to French colonization, and the colony as never recovered from its effects.

Throughout the colony 200 stations were pillaged or destroyed, 200 colonists and whites killed, nineteen wounded. Crops and machinery were ruined, the result of years of labour vanished overnight, and it was difficult enough to persuade even those colonists who had preserved their lives by fleeing, to return to the land. It was next to impossible to recruit new migrants from France to replace those killed. As the 1878 revolt was only the culmination of sporadic resistance ever since the French occupied the island, public opinion in the colony and in France clamoured for an enquiry as to the reason for this state of affairs.

A commission was set up, but much to the disgust of the colonists it was filed away in the French War Office and its findings never revealed to the public. New Caledonians protested at the hushing up of the affair, feeling that they at least should have been informed of the commission's findings, but their protests went unheeded.

The Noumea paper, *La Nouvelle Calédonie*, in its issue of October 23rd, 1879, however, published its version of the main causes of the troubles with the natives, and its conclusions seem to have been shared by the majority of the colonists. It sets out the causes as follows.

*The Main Causes :—*

(a) They are black. We are white. They were the first occupants of the island. We arrived later.

(b) Formerly the vast land was free. Now the stations move closer together and the colonists increase to crowd the natives out. They revolt.

*Secondary Causes in Order of Importance :—*

(a) Limitation of territory of tribes at La Foa made by the Commission of 1879, together with limitations caused by the establishment of the penitentiary at Fonwharry. This annoyed Atai. (Atai, the military head of the revolt, was chief of the Fonwharry tribes, whose taro fields were expropriated to establish the penitentiary farm at Fonwharry—between La Foa and Bourail).

(b) Compulsory labourers in the main towns were nearly always levied from the same tribes, particularly those from Boulouparis and Bourail.

(c) The work on the roads was imposed under such conditions as to hurt the feelings of the natives.

(d) The removal of native objects from the Kanaka burial grounds at La Foa. (Respect for the burial grounds of their ancestors is an over-cultivated sentiment among the Kanakas).

(e) Insufficiency of military posts in the interior.

(f) Lack of roads, in spite of the presence of 6,000 transportees. (This was a sore point with many of the colonists, and aroused much criticism in France. The authorities at Noumea maintained that the convicts were more usefully employed in levelling out hills and filling in the swamp which extended over much of where Noumea now stands, than in building roads. Critics compared the excellent roads in Australia built by convicts, with the roadless state of New Caledonia. The authorities pointed out that New Caledonia was more suited for sea-traffic and little effort was made to build roads. The 1878 revolution forced the authorities to build one of the first roads—for military purposes—from Boulouparis to La Foa, a distance of 41 kms.)

(g) Annoyance caused by the colonists' cattle.

In a later issue of *La Nouvelle Calédonie* two more possible reasons for the natives' annoyance were given :—(a) The lack of proper supervision of the tribes, and (b) provocations on the part of functionaries and colonists in the interior. The nature of the provocations was not specified.

This report is remarkable for its reasonableness, and represents a sincere attempt to understand the natives' viewpoint. According to M. Savoie, in his history of the colony, it was vehemently denied that the revolts had anything to do with the colonists taking native women. The colonists claimed that the natives were only too pleased to exchange their wives for suitable presents—pipes, tomahawks and such welcome trifles. It was apparently the accepted thing for the colonist to support most of the woman's relatives to a certain degree at least, and the natives were said to enjoy the prestige of being admitted to the 'foyer' of the white colonist—whether he was free colonist, 'forcat,' 'relégué' or 'libéré' did not make much difference.

Clovis Savoie believes that one of the main factors in precipitating the revolt was the trespassing by the cattle-owners on the native fields. In the year preceding the revolt in 1877 there had been a great drought, and the beef-raisers lost many head of cattle. Accordingly, Governor de Pritzbuier granted the leading station owners a 'droit de perage,' that is, the right to graze cattle on the penal reserves which had been handed over to the natives. The cattle-raisers had to pay a nominal charge of 50 centimes per head per annum. The whites abused their privileges, allowing their cattle to wander wherever they liked, destroying the natives' taro and igname beds, wrecking the irrigation channels constructed with such painstaking care, and generally wreaking havoc among the tribes. Among other places, the cattle invaded the whole of the valley of La Foa which was at that time thickly populated by tribes. The natives complained bitterly about these depredations, but no one listened to their protests, and so they decided to take the law into their own hands.

The great war chief Atai, described as a native of great intelligence and authority, organized his people for a war of extermination against the whites—and nearly succeeded. *La Nouvelle Calédonie* concluded its summary of main causes for the revolt in the following terms: 'It is quite possible that there were other contributing factors, but this (allowing the cattle to ravage the plantations) is the main

cause which led to the Kanaka insurrection, and one should not forget it for the security of the colony. The tranquillity of New Caledonia is dependent on the respect of one essential principle—to be just towards the Kanaka, to punish him if he has done wrong, but not to treat him harshly unnecessarily.’

In New Caledonia, it seems to have been recognized much earlier than in most countries, that the native peoples did have some rights which should not carelessly be trampled on, and even if it did take a quarter of a century of bitter resistance by the natives before these rights were recognized, there was an attempt by the local people to see that the Kanakas got a better deal.

Henri Riviere, who played a leading part in quelling the native revolt, has left some interesting comment in his work *Souvenirs de la Nouvelle Calédonie—L’Insurrection Canaque* (Memories of New Caledonia—The Kanaka revolt) published in 1881. Riviere, as a true Frenchman, believes in ‘cherchez la femme’ in finding the reason for the revolt. ‘Atai, the war chief, had taken to Mme. X, and one day, he suddenly proposed, in the calmest fashion, to marry her. One can’t deny that in certain circumstances, and with their costume (naked except for an infantry officer’s tunic, with gold shoulder straps and cap), the Kanakas have great grace of form. Mme. X was stupefied and refused. Atai returned to his proposition several times, but was no luckier. His annoyance probably has something to do with the revolt. There is always a feminine reason that determines great projects.’

Riviere also believes that the surprisingly well organized intelligence service of the natives was directed by a couple of escaped convicts—Pothier and Robergeot. ‘If our expeditions didn’t succeed, the reason was that they were denounced to the Kanakas. By whom? By the convicts. To do it directly would have been difficult, but they were the go-betweens. A night or two before the revolt broke out two convicts—Pothier and Robergeot—escaped. These were both notorious for their intelligence and audacity. It is believed that they made common cause with the Kanakas

and helped them with their advice. In connivance with several of their convict comrades, they approached the palisade at night or early in the morning. (This refers to the palisade at the convict farm at Fonwharry which had been converted by Riviere into his base of operations). There they received information from their comrades inside, regarding expeditions planned or under way. Nothing, indeed, would have been easier, and to prevent this leakage was almost impossible.'

It would be interesting to know if those two convicts were from amongst the political deportees, and saw in the native revolution both an opportunity of revenging themselves on the administration, and in striking a blow for their anti-imperialist convictions.

The belief that the ravaging of the native plantations by the station-owners' cattle was one of the chief causes of the revolt is also shared by Riviere, although he seems to think it justified. 'I don't think one need look for special or local causes for this crisis. There are some maybe—but isolated, arbitrary acts, or bad treatment are not sufficient to make a people revolt. A more serious reason would be grievances caused by taking over—more or less justifiably—the land of the Kanakas, and the trespassing of the cattle into those reserves which had been left to them. When their plantations were ravaged, it meant for them hunger, or further unceasing toil. But the great cause of the revolt—one could say the only one—is the antagonism one finds at all times between the conquering and conquered peoples. The latter must be absorbed by the former or disappear. The black or copper-coloured races—be they in America or Oceania—don't absorb. They are too different to the whites...'

In other words, it seemed that Riviere's idea of settling the situation was that the conquered should conveniently disappear. The possibility that the whites might disappear didn't enter his mind, although it was only seventy years previously that the natives in Haiti had risen against their French overlords, and massacred or expelled every white



man on the island, and set up an independent republic which has endured until the present day.

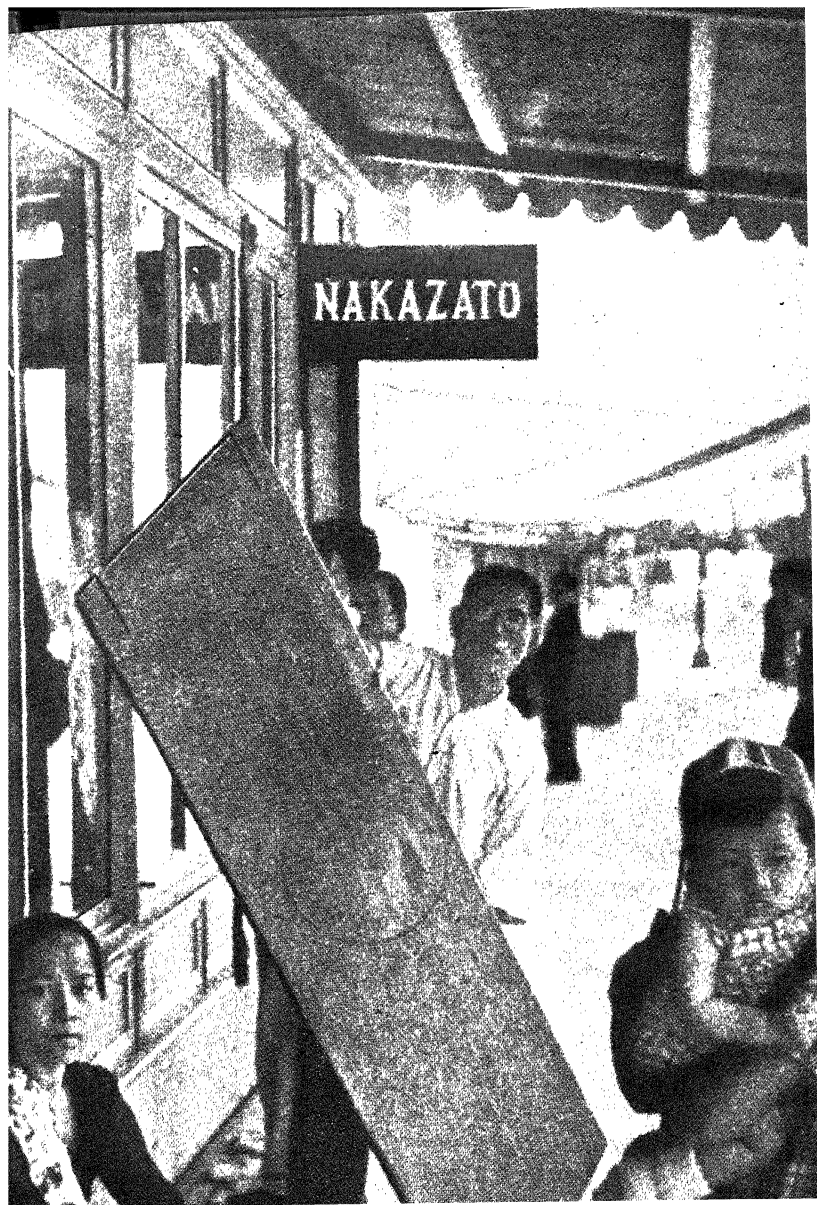
One thing is certain. The many privileges and the comparatively good conditions under which the natives live to-day can be attributed to the vigorous fashion in which they fought for their rights and their uncompromising refusal to be turned into slave labourers.

Even to-day, the natives aren't completely satisfied with their treatment—although one must admit that in comparison with our own Australian aborigines the New Caledonian natives are well off. The chief complaint of those with whom I spoke, was that the mission stations and whites had taken all the best land. I well remember the disgust with which one native coffee planter waved his arm in a comprehensive gesture to show me many acres of a beautifully laid-out flourishing coffee plantation just in front of his house.

'See all that? That all belongs to missions. Native work it, help them pick it, and Fathers get all the money. 'Oughta be our land,' waving this time towards the native village. 'We gotta go 12 kms. from here, to little bit of dry land by the sea, to grow our coffee. Gotta work here on other people's plantations to make enough money.'

No. It can't be claimed that the 30,000-odd natives in New Caledonia are completely satisfied with their present status. During the last war, in 1917, there was another revolt, this time led by a native called Noël.

Noël and his band held out for several months, every now and again making a raid on one of the coastal towns and killing a few settlers. M. Ratzel, who is at present the Chef du Cabinet in New Caledonia, personally supervised the campaign against the native rebels, and with the aid of local and Tahitian troops, who were on their way to France, the revolt was soon quelled. M. Ratzel, who described to me the operations against Noël and his men, was amazed by the almost animal characteristics of the natives when on the trail of a human prey. He swears they lope through the bush, their heads darting this way and





that, nostrils dilating as they sniff the air, exactly like blood-hounds following a scent. M. Ratzel, who has had more experience with the natives than any other resident of the colony, believes that they rely on their sense of smell as much as any other instinct when seeking out their enemies.

Noël, who was reputed to eat his victims, kept police and soldiers at bay, sallying out from his mountain haunts only when short of food. The end came one day, when after obtaining food from an Arab living on the coast, the latter shot him in the back as he turned to go away. Noël, with the almost unbelievable strength of the Melanesians, despite several bullets in his back, turned on his assailant and would have killed him, if another Arab hadn't intervened and sliced Noël's head off with his long kitchen knife, duly collecting 2,000 francs which had been offered for this grisly trophy.

Whether it is as a result of the natives' frequent revolts or not, the visitor to New Caledonia is impressed by the position of the natives to-day. While not much effort has been made to improve their standard of living, in the way of giving them modern comforts, the most important thing is that their right to live without outside interference is recognized. In their inland valleys and along the coastal belts they have their land and well defined rights which may not be trespassed. Their standard of living is at least as high as when the white man came, and even if this is no better than it should be, it is at least an improvement on the state of affairs existing in most places where the native tribes have been subjected to white man's rule.

With some notable exceptions, they don't seem unduly pestered by missionaries, and the rigid prohibitions on the sale of liquor to them is to the credit of the French officials. Exploitation of the Melanesians is a thing of the past, and except for a few engaged in road work—and coffee-picking in season—the natives stick to their own reserves, growing their taro and ignames, and rearing a few pigs.

One doesn't have to be very long in the colony to realize that the natives have greatly decreased in numbers. Border-

ing the road for miles between Noumea and La Foa, are fertile hills serrated with regular ridges that at one time represented native cultivation patches. In some places there are fields covering scores of acres, now covered with grass, growing on the evenly-spaced terraces which formerly produced taro and ignames. To have kept such large areas under cultivation, the natives must have been capable of extensive communal work, and the tribes must have been much larger than they are to-day. Estimates as to the number of natives on the island when the French arrived, vary from between 60,000 and 100,000, compared with 30,000 to-day.

To visit the tribes one must obtain special permission from the Governor himself—mainly, I believe, to keep a check on foreign propagandists and to ensure that no liquor-selling traders go amongst them. The main impression of my first visit to the tribes was the extreme tidiness and cleanliness, not only of the huts but of the surrounding paths and outbuildings. My guide showed me, with some pride, the type of hut formerly used by the natives—a very tall, cone-shaped structure, with round walls of niaouli bark or straw, a pointed steeple-shaped thatched roof, crowned with a few wooden carvings, and one low entrance which was the only opening for light and air.

The administration has now taught the natives to build more hygienic huts, of bungalow type, with neat white-washed stone walls, plenty of light and air space, and wide verandahs supported by niaouli poles—and in some de luxe residences, glass windows. The administration provided the material and taught the natives the rudiments of construction. In every tiny village there is an 'infirmière' where the sick may be taken until a doctor can be sent from Noumea or the nearest nursing centre. There is a regular bi-annual medical inspection of the natives, and in many of the villages, schools are established where the native children learn their three 'R's.'

At the Col d'Ameu village, between Kanala and La Foa, I arrived towards evening, just as wrinkled old popinées,

pipes in mouth, were straggling home along the road with great bundles of firewood strapped to their backs. Pipes are very popular with the older ladies, who never move without a piece of wood charred at one end which seems to keep smouldering all day, and serves as a perpetual pipe-lighter. A few children were playing about, but retired to watch from behind some trees. Except in the coastal regions, white visitors to the tribes are very rare. In a level piece of land behind the main group of huts were the cultivation patches—taro plants with their immense leaves, manioc, from which tapioca is made, the inevitable sweet potatoes, and beans—laid out neatly in rows with not a weed to be seen. Blue smoke was curling up as the housewives prepared their hubbies' meal in the communal pot, while hubbies and elder children were filing back from their cultivation patches, some of them chewing joints of sugar-cane, and most of them with long knives in their hands.

Clumps of bananas and bread fruit trees surrounding most of the huts and the village, gave the impression of quiet simple prosperity. The guide pointed out the chief's house and explained that in Col d'Ameu as in most villages the chief's house was equipped with telephone, so that medical aid—maternity cases provide almost the only excuse for medical attention—could be quickly summoned in an emergency.

Back along the road to La Foa, we met another group of natives—clean-limbed and of magnificent physique, the men with scrubby moustaches and great heads of hair—bargaining with the driver of a large van, which makes the round of the tribes, exchanging a few simple goods, cotton prints and matches, for the natives' bananas, breadfruit, and in some places, coconuts.

On their reserves the natives can easily produce enough for their needs. They have no worry about the necessity of family limitation, nor have they to worry about the weekly rent bill, or gas and electric light accounts. When they want some little luxuries they have to plant a few extra square yards of cultivation, and when it has been harvested squat

out on the road until the mobile trading unit comes along. If the trader does cheat them—and he probably does—it doesn't make much difference. In all their primitiveness the natives have something that the most highly civilized countries have not been able to give their people—security; the possibility of rearing their families with the certain knowledge that they can provide for them.

I won't easily forget the bewilderment of a Loyalty Island sailor who was on board the *Pierre Loti* when she was taken over by the Australian Government for war service. The crew had to stay in Australia for several weeks, until a boat was available to take them back to Noumea, and this boat happened to be the same on which I travelled. One of the natives used to come to my cabin regularly to talk about the war, about Australia and New Caledonia, and why I was going there. Although he had joined up with the Free French volunteers and would soon be on his way to North Africa, Sydney had given him a great shock, and he wasn't certain whether he was on the right track or not.

'There's something mighty wrong with the way they run your country,' he said one evening. 'People stop me in the streets and ask me for food. Me, a Kanaka. I can't figger that out. It's a big place, looks a hundred times bigger than Calédonie, and people can't get enough kai kai (food). People walking about without work. Why, in Calédonie, we didn't know such things could happen. If somebody wants extra money, why, they go an' work for somebody. There's always plenty to do. If they don't, they jus' go back to their tribe and grow food. Nobody ever goes hungry. I tell you what. We're all a bit puzzled about this business, my comrades and me, after stopping in Sydney so long. It's a fine place, but's a mighty bad place to be if you haven't any money.'

And he was right. The natives don't seem to need any super-educated financial geniuses to hold conferences and inquests, to speak of the necessity of balanced budgets, and favourable trade balances and protective tariffs, or limitation of production, or cutting down of the standard of living or

increasing the hours of labour. They know without the help of any experts that to support their tribe, they will need to plant a certain number of acres of taro and igname. The labour is shared more or less equally by the whole tribe, and if a member is sick or crippled or crazy, he gets an equal share of the food—in fact, if he's crazy he will get a bigger share, because crazy people are venerated amongst the tribesmen. What they can grow over and above their needs can be exchanged for some luxury items.

If some of our experts were to go among them for a time and forget all the economics and political theories they have ever learnt, forget to ask the natives whether they believe in national socialism, capitalism, democracy, socialism, fascism or communism or Douglas credit, he would find that they reckoned him crazy for even bothering to inquire why their system worked so well. It's so absurdly simple. As long as there's land, rain, sun and seed, everybody can be happy and well fed. The economist would have a terrible job explaining that sometimes in Australia, because of the state of world markets, wheat was unsaleable, and had to be stored on the wharves and in silos while many people couldn't get enough bread to eat because, until the wheat was sold there wouldn't be enough money to give the people to buy the wheat. It would be difficult to explain to ignorant natives that one of the reasons why people went hungry, was that there was too much food. Providing the natives didn't think he was crazy the first time, and just turn him out to wander among the tribes, they would pull out a long string of tiny shells, pierced through the centre and threaded on a long piece of coconut fibre.

'This is our money,' they would say. 'We can make as much of it as we like, as long as we have the patience to do it. But it only has value because it's beautiful and takes a long time to make. We don't go hungry because we don't have any of this. We have our bellies filled first before we start collecting things like this. What do you mean by saying that those people can't buy bread until they have money, and they can't have money because they can't sell the wheat ?



That doesn't make sense to us. Why don't you just forget about the money? If you have piles of wheat, and crowds of hungry people, why don't you just make some money like we do and give it to them, or just give them some wheat straight out?'

And the poor economist would have to quieten these simple uneducated savages, by talking in a very learned way about costs of production, and the inevitable laws of supply and demand, and the law of diminishing returns of labour, so that the natives would be persuaded in the end that they were really doing a very wicked thing by solving their problems in such a simple way. They would feel that they were not a civilized people at all until they had about 10% of their tribesmen unemployed, with the balance working much harder because of the shortage of labour, destroying portion of their crop because of lack of markets, and then giving part of their profit back to the 10% of unemployed, who would not be able to buy much of the original production because of the increased prices the local tribesmen must pay, due to the lack of markets. Either they would feel like that, or they would solve the problem by hitting the economist over the head with a 'casse-tête,' and turn back to their taro beds again.

## 'MOI NON CONTENT JAPONAIS'

MINORITY problems are something which one associates more with the Balkan countries than with South Sea Islands, yet these latter have their own very vexed problems in that connection. The ironic part is that while in Europe minority problems are the natural result of thousands of years of migration and wars of conquest the European owners of the South Sea Islands deliberately elected to create minority problems in their haste to get as much as possible out of the colonies in the shortest possible time.

It was the American Civil War that first led to the introduction of cheap labourers in the Pacific. The disruption caused by that war resulted in a world shortage of cotton. In Australia this led to a certain Captain Towns, of Townsville, Queensland, 'blackbirding' Melanesian labourers away from New Hebrides to work on his cotton plantations in Queensland. In less than eight years over 11,000 New Hebrideans were 'blackbirded' away to work on Towns' and other Australian cotton plantations. Any means at all was used to get the natives away, and a letter written by Captain Towns gives some idea of the hypocritical methods used. The letter which was written with the intention of enlisting the aid of missionaries in his blackbirding venture reads as follows :

'Should this meet the eye of any gentleman in the sacred calling, I beg to explain the nature of the voyage upon which I am about to dispatch the bearer, Captain Graeber with the schooner *Don Juan*... I am endeavouring to try out natives from the island... I, with my cotton emigration (returning them every six to twelve months) will do more towards civilizing them in one year than you can in ten... You may be able to point out to the poor, unsuspecting natives that they will have nothing to fear...'

The danger of creating coloured minorities in Australia

was averted by the introduction of the white Australia policy, which, although by no means an ideal institution, at least seemed the most effective means in the present state of society to ensure that decent standards could be preserved.

In Tahiti an Englishman named Stewart established himself at Atimaono on the West Coast, in the grand way of the Southern American planters, and introduced Chinese coolie labourers to grow cotton. Stewart became the cotton king of the South Seas, built a castle overlooking his cotton plantations, and had a bodyguard of native retainers who carried him about on a litter when he was too tired to walk. As long as the war in America lasted, cotton prices soared, and Stewart flourished. With the end of the Civil War, however, American cotton came back again on the world markets, and the Tahitian cotton fields were turned over to sugar. Stewart died, his castle crumbled to ruins—but the Chinese stayed.

To-day the Chinese not only own the original plantation on which they worked as miserable coolie labourers, but they control the commercial life of Tahiti and all the islands of French Oceania. It is a fact that if the Chinese were to withdraw from Tahiti the island would be in a state of economic chaos. Every tiny village store and bakery is run and controlled by Chinese. The fresh vegetables sold in Papeete market are all grown by Chinese. The chief retail stores and cafés, the transport service, even many of the inter-island trading schooners, are owned by Chinese.

The Chinese of course incur the odium of whites and natives alike—even though their qualities of thrift and industry which have won them a dominant place in the island commerce were the prime reasons for their introduction in the first place. No one thinks of blaming those who brought them to the island for the sake of their cheap labour. Coolie labourers are apparently expected to emulate the little beetle that clears away the prickly pear in Australia, and which, after finishing the special task for which they are introduced, conveniently turn on their backs and die. Fortunately humans are more adaptable than beetles—even coolie humans.

In Fiji the introduction of the sugar industry meant a search for labour, as the local natives were 'lazy,' preferring the easy living on their own land to working for other people. At first recruiters brought in Melanesians from the New Hebrides and the Solomons, but these, for some unaccountable reasons, were not at all keen to work for white people. They were also used to the comfortable life on their own land. Within a few years, it was found necessary to repatriate them, and look for another labour source. In 1877 it was decided by 'agreement between the authorities in Great Britain, Fiji and India' to indent Indian coolies. To-day the descendants of these coolies nearly outnumber the native Fijians. Between 1921 and 1938 the number of Indians grew from 60,634 to 89,833, while the Fijians increased only from 84,475 to 99,595, representing only about half the rate of the Indian increase.

When the use of indentured labour was stopped during the last war, planters were in despair, and in order to obtain cheap sugar, it was necessary to slightly raise the status of the Indian coolies, and establish them as tenant farmers. To-day they control the sugar industry of the colony—at least, as far as the production end is concerned. The Colonial Sugar Refining Co., with somewhere about three million pounds invested in the colony, looks after the processing and marketing side of the business.

The position of the Indians in Fiji is best summed up in the 1939 edition of *The Pacific Islands Year Book*. 'The sugar company now has £3,000,000 invested in the Fiji sugar industry; and world competition in sugar production is so keen that its main problem in Fiji is to ensure an adequate supply of cane at a price which will protect that huge investment. It appears to have done that by the establishment of the Indian cane-growing community.

'The Indian farmers also grow cotton, rice, and maize. They are industrious, frugal agriculturists and keen traders—1,500 of them are storekeepers. The taxi-cab business in Fiji is an Indian monopoly—there are 1,500 licensed drivers. They are increasing more rapidly than the

Fijian natives—what is to be their share in the future of the colony is a most interesting social and political problem.

‘The relationship between the Indians and the Fijians is for the most part excellent—even in close association as landlord and tenant, they get along together very well. The Indian settler, having provided the solution of various labour problems and become active primary producers, have been a blessing to Fiji, and have made the colony prosperous. In return they have been provided with freedom, health and prosperity to a degree they could never have known in overcrowded India. Generally, they are good and law-abiding citizens. They are now so large a community that special provision has to be made for them in connection with all social services and public utilities. For a time they carried on an agitation for political equality with the Europeans; but in more recent years they seem to have settled down in peace and contentment.’

Since the above paragraphs were written the problem of political equality has been raised in a much stronger form by the Indian community, and as the European represent about two and a half per cent. of the total population, the increasing pressure from the Indians to political representation in the colony’s administration will lead to an awkward situation.

It was undoubtedly partly due to the claims of the Indians for political representation that led Sir Harry Luke to suspend constitutional government at the beginning of the war, and substitute government by decree.

Tahiti has its Chinese, Fiji has its Indians, and New Caledonia has its Japanese. Although they are outnumbered by the Javanese and Tonkinese, there is an important difference in that the Japanese are all free settlers while the others as indentured labourers can be repatriated at will by the government. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, the Japanese in New Caledonia were brought out as indentured labourers in the early days of the colony, and having served their period of indentureship elected to remain on the island.

Although there are only about 1,500 in the colony, their influence is much higher proportionately than any other racial group.

My first realization of a Japanese problem in New Caledonia was when walking along the road, one Sunday, in a most remote part of the island—between the villages of Ponérihouen and Poindimié on the north-east coast. The sound of a bugle assailed my ears, and a few minutes later a husky, young bare-bosomed native dashed out from some rows of green coffee bushes and hastened to join me in my promenade.

Every now and again he would stop in the middle of the road and blow a few notes on his bugle, and then run and catch up to me again, until his overpowering inspiration led him to stop again and play his lusty trills. As I apparently disappointed him by not asking him who he was and where he was going, he soon volunteered some information.

'Me "engagé" for Free French. Aller casser la gueule des Japonais bien vite.' (Going to clean up Japanese pretty quick).

Our conversation didn't proceed very rapidly, as I was in a hurry to cover the twenty odd kilometres to Ponérihouen before it got too dark. Eventually I asked him if he knew where I could get some drinking coconuts, hoping that he would obligingly shin up one of the palms lining the roads, and pull a couple of nuts down.

His sense of property rights had apparently been well prepared, however, and he merely grinned and said, in effect: 'You cumalonga me and soon buy coconuts.'

Surely enough half a kilometre along the road, he directed me to a small clearing where stood a ramshackle shed in front of which were a few natives lounging about. A sign was chalked up on a piece of a kerosene case 'Epicerie' (grocery store). The proprietor—a small mouse-like inoffensive-looking little Japanese—was busily thumping a bag of flour with a stick to loosen it up a little before he tipped it into smaller bags. His wife—or concubine as she probably was—a most handsome Melanesian girl, was giving

the breast to a wholly Japanese-looking baby while another five children—living testimonies of Mendel's heredity theory—played about on the pressed dirt floor. Two of them looked pure Melanesian, two pure Japanese, and the other two were pleasant Japanese-Melanesian mixtures.

There couldn't have been more than twenty or thirty native huts within kilometres, and yet there was sufficient trade to support a Japanese 'boîte.' The counter of the store supported a few jars of stuck-together sweets, a coffee urn and a few plates with doughy-looking biscuits. The shelves were empty except for a few tins of sardines and condensed milk. After I had paid a franc for drinking the juice of a couple of nuts, and another franc for a handful of doughy biscuits for my bugle-blowing companion we continued on our way, and this time it was I who was more anxious to talk.

'Tel me. Why do you want to "casser les gueules des Japonais" ?'

'They come here. Take our women. Make Japanese kids and soon whole island Japanese.'

'But why do your women like to live with the Japs. ?'

'Japs got plenty money. Popinée go there buy bon-bons, dresses. Jap gives them dresses, promise them plenty money, no work. He always get best popinée that way. We clean 'em up soon. Quick, finish,' and he made a picturesque disembowelling motion with his bugle.

It seems that there is no village in New Caledonia, too small, or too poor to support a Japanese store, even though the latter may be a more humble dwelling than the lowliest native hut. They serve as a sort of social centre where the village lads meet in the evening and drink a few cups of coffee.

Sometimes stronger liquor than coffee is also served. While I was in the colony, the Japanese Consul protested that one of his subjects had been left in a half dead condition in his village store. An enquiry was made and it was found that the Japanese storekeeper had been selling liquor to the natives—something strictly forbidden in New Caledonia.

When the natives became troublesome he put them out and

shut up shop, but later the natives broke down the shutters and demanded more drink. The Japanese produced a pistol and fired at one of them, whereupon the others set to, and left him more dead than alive. The authorities wisely refrained from action against the natives, and warned the store-keeper that he was lucky not to be fined in addition to his other injuries, for his flagrant breach of the regulations.

Back in Noumea, I asked the little Javanese servant her opinion about the Japanese.

'What you think about Japanese, Awes ?'

'Moi non content Japonais ! (Me no like Japanese !) Parler toujours camarade, camarade, mais pousser pousser tout le temps.' (Talk always comrade, comrade, but all the time 'on the make'.)

As a summing up of Japanese foreign policy, this seemed a classic exposition of the situation, but I was anxious to find out exactly to what Awes referred. After further questioning, I learned that Javanese and natives were encouraged to buy at Japanese stores and eat in their restaurants. The Japanese were particularly keen to have Javanese mistresses and allowed the women to run up credits until they were hopelessly in debt—and could only pay in one way.

On shop counters and restaurant tables are always plenty of Japanese propaganda books, showing the might of the Japanese armed forces. Natives employed by Japanese are paid higher wages ; and conditions of employment are easier than in other establishments.

'You needn't work so hard now of course, because in Japan we don't believe in making people work as hard as they do here in New Caledonia—' the natives are told, doubtlessly with the purpose of making them sigh for the day when the Japanese would come and liberate them.

There are very few Japanese women in the colony, mainly because the administration refused to recognize the Japanese law which allows proxy marriage by correspondence. Japanese women are not allowed to emigrate alone. The only way in which a Japanese can marry one of his own kind, is to go back to Japan, marry there and return to the



colony. Figures relating to the domestic arrangements of the Japanese are interesting.

Thirty-six are married to Japanese women, and another 20 to white women of French origin. Of the remainder 107 live in concubinage with Javanese, Indo-Chinese or Melanesian native women, and another 30 with white women of French origin. This only accounts for about 200 of the 1,500 male Japanese in the colony, and these figures take into consideration only those who are more or less permanently settled in their relationships. Many of the remainder live in a state of short-term concubinage. Of the 200 odd Japanese children, 51 are of pure Japanese descent, 145 of Japanese fathers and Indo-Chinese, Melanesian or Javanese mothers, and the remaining 122 of Japanese fathers and white mothers.

The size of the Japanese population is far outweighed by the importance of Japanese commercial interests in the island. Apart from the retail traders—most New Caledonians have their hair cut, and clothes tailored and laundered by Japanese, and eat vegetables grown in Japanese market gardens—the Japanese control large mining concessions in the colony.

Japanese mining interests date back to the days before the last war, when they acquired a nickel mine at Dumbea, near Noumea, but this was later sold to the Société le Nickel. From 1935 onwards, however, Japanese mining interests have been very active in the colony, prospecting, mining and buying ore from the small independent miners.

The opening up of a large iron concession in the south of the island at Goro, gave Japan her first real foothold in New Caledonia. This is the only iron field being exploited in the colony, and in 1939—the first year that operations commenced—more than 100,000 tons of 52% iron ore was sent to feed the Japanese armament industries. In 1940 production was approximately 300,000 tons, and from 1941 onwards production is expected to exceed 500,000 tons per annum.

The Cascade Iron Mine at Goro—which of course is operated by a good French-sounding company ‘Société le Fer’—is the most modern mining concern in the colony. Modern wharves and loading plant can load 700 tons of ore in 15 hours. Fast motor-driven 10,000-ton steamers maintain a regular service between Goro and Kobe and Yokohama. At the mine itself there is a self-contained community including more than 400 Javanese labourers.

In connection with these latter, it is interesting to note that when the exploitation of the iron field started the management asked permission to import 2,000 labourers from Japan. The local administration refused however, and the Japanese were told they must make do with Javanese labourers. As only 400 of these latter were engaged, people have wondered ever since why the Japanese wanted to bring in 2,000 of their compatriots when 400 Javanese could do the work.

The war has had an adverse effect on the Japanese mining activities. From the outset, purchases of nickel matte were restricted, and later a total ban was placed on the export of nickel matte and chrome ore to Japan.

Some idea of the importance of New Caledonian ores for the Japanese heavy industry can be obtained from figures published in the Noumea paper, *Bulletin de Commerce*. In 1940 a Japanese-controlled export company—the Société Minière de l’Océanie—exported 30,000 tons of nickel from their own concessions at Kua, as well as 16,000 tons bought from the independent miners. In January, 1941, 3,500 tons were sent from their own mines, and 22,660 tons bought from the local miners. The following month export licences for nickel were withdrawn.

As far as iron is concerned, in the first two months of 1941 iron was being sent away at the rate of 25,000 tons a month from Goro, but it was later restricted to a quota of 24,000 tons every three months. At first Japan refused to believe that the New Caledonian administration would be so unkind as to forbid them from taking iron away from their own concessions. After the restrictions had been imposed, Japanese

boats continued to arrive for iron, even after the stipulated quota of 24,000 tons had been taken.

'But we didn't know about the restriction. You can't let us go back to Japan with an empty boat,' said the captain of the first boat to arrive after the 24,000 tons had been removed. The governor relented and allowed the ship to load. Almost immediately another arrived in Noumea harbour with the same story, but this time the governor was adamant. Boats continued to arrive, until at one stage there was an armada of five Japanese boats all waiting in Noumea Harbour at the same time, with all the captains pleading the same plaintive story of innocence of the new regulations. A couple of the boats had to be removed later to make way for a patrolling Australian bomber to land on the harbour. Some of the boats had to wait for more than a fortnight before they were finally convinced that the governor really meant that they weren't to load any more iron until the three months were up.

Not long after the five boats had departed, another one arrived, and a very indignant Japanese captain took a taxi round to the British Consulate.

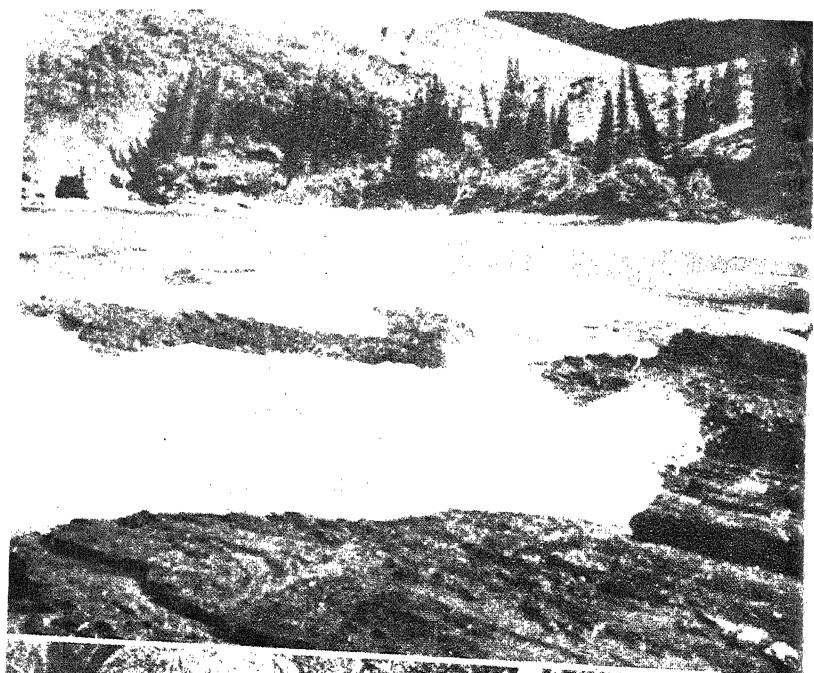
'What you mean your bombing plane shadow my ship all way down from Solomons?' he demanded.

'Well, you know, there have been some British ships sunk lately in the Pacific by German raiders. They were using Japanese names and flying the Japanese flag,' the Consul explained gently.

'Me never heard that. Very wicked thing sink British ships under Japanese flag,' the little captain innocently replied.

There was a good deal of divided opinion in New Caledonia about the wisdom of banning mineral exports to Japan. Japanese-subsidised French merchants were able to put up a strong case in the local press—and even a stronger one by means of a whispering campaign that the loss of the Japanese market would be a serious loss to the colony. Figures were produced to prove that even the holding of Japanese ships in the harbour for a fortnight was a loss to the colony. The





reasoning was that the two perfectly New Caledonianised companies, Société le Fer and Société Minière de l'Océanie, had chartered the ships to come and take away iron and nickel. As the ships had come and there was no loading for them, they naturally had to wait until the owners in Japan could arrange cargoes for them in other ports. Thus the companies in New Caledonia were responsible for paying the harbour dues and the wages of the boats' crews. They, of course, omitted to mention that the companies concerned were actually Japanese.

On the other hand, those not interested financially in mineral sales to Japan were pleased that the ban had been imposed, and even pressed for a total ban of iron exports, and the taking over by New Caledonia of the iron concession at Goro—at least till the end of the war. From the strictly materialistic viewpoint of self-interest, these were opposed to the removal of resources which the colony might some day need. Others opposed trade with Japan in the interests of 'Pacific solidarity,' because of Japan's line-up with the Axis Powers.

Unfortunately, just as this new idea of 'Pacific solidarity' was gaining ground in the colony, there came news that Australia—the Pacific sun around which the little stars of South Sea solidarity were supposed to rotate—was sending large quantities of zinc concentrates and lead to Japan. Following that disclosure the local press was able to publish, in heavy type, that the Japanese ships which had been held up in Noumea had left to load copra at Tonga and other British possessions. New Caledonians after that didn't show the same interest in Pacific solidarity, especially as about the same time another boat pulled in at Noumea from Australia with goods—many of which were made in Japan. As these were the same goods that New Caledonian merchants were in the habit of importing from Japan—against mineral and copra exports—New Caledonians, quite logically began to ask why they shouldn't trade direct with Japan, rather than pay increased prices for the same goods, after Australian import and export merchants had tacked their profit and extra

*Facing Above* : Beach of Pines at Bourail.

*Below* : Coffee field.

freight charges on. 'Pacific solidarity' received, in fact, another nasty jolt.

The Japanese are not very popular on the island for various reasons, most of which have nothing to do with race. A trading class always comes in for a good deal of criticism—especially if it happens to be foreign. French business men who are in competition with Japanese store-keepers maintain that these latter are subsidized by their government so that they can sell their goods cheaper, and gain more influence among the natives and indentured labourers, who trade almost exclusively at the Japanese stores. On the other hand, because the natives and coolie labourers are used to being treated very much as underlings by the whites, they tend to despise the Japanese, who treat them with exaggerated respect.

One of the last ceremonies I attended before leaving Noumea during my most recent trip to the colony, was one at which the newly appointed Japanese Consul, to mark his accession to office in New Caledonia, laid a wreath at the war memorial. The ceremony was widely advertised in the local press, and the president of the Returned Soldiers' League made a special appeal for all 'Anciens Combattants' to be present.

The ceremony was timed for 11 a.m. At about 10-45 people began to roll along. The British Consul and the Australian Trade Commissioner were there. The governor was represented by his Chef de Cabinet. The Mayor and Chief of the Armed Forces, the President of the Returned Soldiers' League with a Standard Bearer to lead the returned soldiers, arrived in good time and took up their positions. Three photographers, including myself, had arrived particularly early to obtain strategic positions from which to shoot our pictures. Punctually at 11 a.m. the beautifully attired Japanese officials arrived, black top hats, morning coats and striped trousers, contrasting effectively with the white suits and uniforms of the other officials.

The only thing missing was the audience. The Standard Bearer, looking very uncomfortable, tried to make his banner

look as inconspicuous as possible—because there were no returned soldiers to fall in behind it. Under the shop verandah opposite the war memorial were a few loungers and half a dozen children. Lined along the footpath on the other side, was dutifully arrayed almost the entire Noumean Japanese community, decked out in their gala clothes.

The top-hatted Japanese consular officials carried an immense wreath to the foot of the war memorial, from where the Consul carried out the final operation of depositing it on a marble slab. After that there were many perfectly inclined bows and much doffing of shiny black hats as the Consul was presented to the few notables present, following which the Japanese community, with hands folded on stomachs and their heads bared, leaned humbly forward as the elected representative of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor passed along in front of them.

From a purely technical piece of wreath-laying the ceremony was a triumph, but from a propaganda point of view, it fell very flat. In fact, the deliberate abstention on the part of the returned soldiers and the spontaneous boycott on the part of the civil population turned the ceremony into an anti-Japanese demonstration. Once again, however, one must emphasize that this was not due to any racial feeling. Those with whom I spoke all had the same reason for staying away from the ceremony. It seemed to them 'honteux' (shameful) that such a mockery should be allowed, when the Japanese were putting all sorts of pressure on the sister colony of French Indo-China, and even supported Thailand in its war against the French colonists.

The Japanese problem in New Caledonia is either much over-exaggerated, or it is underrated. Those that see a spy in every Japanese store-keeper and market gardener are bogey hunters that only succeed in fostering racial hatred. On the other hand those that help the Japanese heavy industry—the Mitsuis and Mitsubushis—to get a foothold in the colony, are probably underestimating Japanese aims. Experience has shown that when a nation has predominant economic interests in a country, it tends to seek political in-



fluence—and a day usually arrives when those interests have to be 'protected' by force.

Japanese representatives in the colony disclaim any great interest in New Caledonia. Thus the retiring Japanese Consul, early in 1941, made a farewell speech to the New Caledonian people, expressing himself as follows :

'Je suis ni politicien, ni économiste ; je ne comprends rien de ces choses, mais je suis un profond admirateur de la nature. Et c'est dans son sein que l'on mesure l'inanité des choses humaines : la grandeur, la puissance, l'argent, ne sont que des mots...' (I am neither politician nor economist. I understand nothing of these things ; but I am a deep admirer of Nature. And it is in her bosom that can one gauge the inanity of human affairs. Greatness, power, money are only words). Whether that is a fair expression of Japanese interest in New Caledonia, or whether it was for entertaining praiseworthy sentiments that the Consul was recalled, is difficult to say.

WITH MICK GRIFFITH TO THE  
PLAINE DES LACS

MICK GRIFFITH is one of the best known mining characters in New Caledonia—and one of the best liked. Mick admits that he likes a drink or two—or more—but always hastens to tell you that when he's in the bush he's 'off the likker.' With his brother he came to New Caledonia in the early 1900's—as a timber-getter—helping to deplete the giant kauri forests which existed in the early days of the colony. When timber-getting began to be played out, Mick turned his attention to prospecting and mining, and found that one can have much more luxurious debauches from the results of a successful prospecting tour, than after years of toil as a timber-getter.

Thus when he returned to Sydney and Melbourne in 1939 after having sold his nickel mine to Krupps' representative he was able to go through £1,500 in six weeks with the greatest of pleasure. He borrowed his fare back to Noumea, and regarded his new situation quite philosophically. 'There's plenty more holes in the ground where a man can pick up a few more quid when he wants them,' said Mick, and promptly went bush again for a few weeks. The result of this trip caused a well-known Australian mining engineer to rush across to New Caledonia, and caused another even better-known industrial concern to send over their expert a few weeks later to check up on the report brought back by the first engineer.

When I met Mick he wasn't very sober, but he had such an open, likeable face that it was difficult not to take notice of what he said, even if his language was a little thick.

'So yer'n Australian journalist are yer, hic?' he asked.

'Well, I can show yer something that'll make yer — eyes pop right out of yer — head.'

At one stage Mick used to be a very good boxer, and now

he is still a bit punch drunk. His hands and arms flicker all over the place as he speaks and when he walks he always seems on the point of stumbling over. Until I got used to these little habits, I was so fascinated by his hand play that I never listened very carefully to what he said.

'Make your —— eyes pop right out of yer —— head' he emphasized with his arms coming to rest, crossed on his chest, and his head nearly on the table. I hastened to assure him that I should be glad to have my eyes put to such a test, and there and then he arranged to do so.

'We'll get a car, shove a bit of kai kai in a bag. 'Uve yer got any blankets?' he demanded suddenly. 'Well it don't matter, Priday and I'll get enough of 'em.' (Mr. Priday, by the way, is Reuter's and United Press correspondent in New Caledonia, and formerly well known in West Australian journalistic circles).

'Yer don' mind sleepin' on the ground? Good. We'll get the —— car to Plum, to the Forestière if we can, an' I'll ring the Jap so's he'll have the choot-choot motor ready for us to go up to the 23 kilometre.'

All these directions meant nothing to me, but as Priday nodded to me every now and again to agree, I made intelligent noises of assent. Without having the slightest idea of where we were going or what we were going to see, I agreed to be ready at 5 o'clock next morning for a three days' excursion—somewhere.

At 5 a.m., I was sitting on the edge of the bed waiting for a motor car to hoot, as arranged. At 6 a.m. I was still sitting there. At 6-15 I went down and had coffee, and commenced searching for Mick. Arrived at his hotel—everybody in New Caledonia who hasn't a home lives in a hotel—I found Priday vainly trying to remind Mick of the excursion he had promised for the three of us. My entrance clinched the discussion, and Mick jumped out of bed, apologising for his lapse of memory.

Blankets were rolled up into swags, Mick searched for and found his compass, while Priday went looking for a taxi. The next thing was the purchase of kai kai—which in any part

of the Pacific signifies food. Priday, who had a bad cold, was in favour of taking along a bottle of rum, but Mick, to my surprise, was strongly opposed to this. He knew his limitations. Kai kai consisted of half a dozen long rolls of bread, 6 tins each of beef, paté (type of beef paste) and preserved fruit, with a couple of dozen small lemons with which to fight Priday's cold.

The 5 a.m. became 10-30 a.m. by the time our taxi rolled out of Noumea and turned south-eastwards towards our first destination—Plum, about 30 kilometres from Noumea. On the way we passed the St. Louis mission station, one of the earliest mission settlements in the island—and possessing 10,000 acres of the richest land within miles of Noumea. It was obtained by giving a few axes to tribal chiefs. Most of the colony's sugar used to be grown at St. Louis, but now there is only enough cultivated for the monks to distil the famous St. Louis rum, known by connoisseurs the world over. As we drove past, a new crop was flourishing on the flat level acres bordering the road—the monks' first attempt to grow rice in New Caledonia. Arrived at our Plum, we had to obtain permission from the gendarme before we could proceed. There had been an outbreak of the plague in a Catholic mission station at Touaourou, in the direction of our excursion, and a 'cordon sanitaire' had been placed around the entire district. As we were able to convince the gendarme that we weren't going within the prescribed distance of the plague spot, we were allowed to continue.

Mick and Priday explained to me then, that in normal circumstances we would have gone by boat, to within a few miles of our destination, but the plague had interrupted the coastal steamer service, and as we had to reach the far side of the island we would have to go as far as possible by car and 'choot-choot motor,' and walk the rest. I was kept guessing as to the identity of 'choot-choot motor' until we arrived at 'La Forestière,' the site of a huge timber mill. My guides informed me that an Australian company had worked a kauri concession in this district and taken out millions of feet of some of the best timber in the world.

The place had something of the air of a ghost camp about it, with the engines, and lines of sideless trucks which had been used for bringing the timber down from the forests miles inland, all in perfect condition. The whole equipment was left just as it had been when the last log was handled. Tremendous transport difficulties would make the cost of dismantling and transferring the plant to Noumea heavier than importing a new one from Sydney. There were several neatly built houses but no sign of life, until we walked half a kilometre up the line and could see blue smoke curling up from one of the cottages.

Mick was hailed with a great shout, and a couple of Japanese who were at work in a near-by shed, repairing a boat's bottom, dropped their tools to come over and welcome Mick, and be presented to Friday and me. We dropped our packs on the ground alongside the railway line, and followed the Japanese up to the source of the blue smoke. Following our guides' example we slipped our boots off before we stepped on the spotlessly white, kauri floor of a tidy verandah. A couple of gravely smiling Javanese women came out. There were more introductions and we were invited into another spotlessly clean kauri-planked room.

Table-cloth and plates were laid, a tin of beef, loaf of bread and a litre of wine produced by the silent bare-footed Javanese. Anti-mosquito coils were lit, and while Mick, between mouthfuls of bread and beef, conversed with Japanese and Javanese alike in a vile mixture of French-Melanesian and Javanese, Friday and I concentrated on having a good meal and observing the cleanliness and tidiness of the bush establishment. Mick's French was enough to make any French scholar retch, but, as he said, it was based on utility rather than grammar, and Mick could certainly make himself understood anywhere on the island, whether he was amongst Javanese, Arabs, Chinese, natives or French. Of course his expressive hands played their part too.

The meal finished, we were introduced to the 'choot-choot motor'—a motor-bike engine geared to a small railway trolley. There was room for four passengers, one seated on

the driver's seat, and three more on a long coffin-like narrow box mounted directly on the trolley floor. Our provisions were stacked in the box, a bag thrown over the top for upholstery and we were ready for our 23 kilometre journey. With a Javanese boy in the saddle and myself as camera-man installed on the front of the box we set out along the 24-inch gauge line, while Mick regaled us with stories of terrible accidents that had occurred along the line.

When the line was laid it seemed they had no curved rails, and the process of rounding the many hair-pin bends en route was extremely painful, as we lurched round in a series of jumps as the wheels met the join in the straight rails. Mick explained that it was usually at these places that the accidents occurred. The 'choot-choot' sometimes didn't make the curve and went straight over, to land in the river a few hundred feet below us. While my legs were dangling down in front of the box, Mick remembered another accident that occurred to a native, who was sitting like me, when a truck load of ore swung round a corner, hit the 'choot-choot' head-on, and cut the native's legs off at the knees.

'— you should have seen him as his legs went flying down into the creek,' he said enthusiastically. He relieved my feelings and incidentally Friday's too, by telling us that the line was out of use at the present time, so we weren't likely to encounter any traffic. Nevertheless I tucked my feet up and sat on them, as apparently the system of signalling wasn't very efficient and there seemed no way of telling if something was travelling in the opposite direction. The grade was uphill, so no record speeds could be attained, although I was mentally trying to work out how fast the contraption would travel when we were coming back with the weight of four men to give it impetus. For most of the journey the track skirted the Blue River, a wide rushing stream. With the river on our right, and steep barren-looking hills on our left, the track wound in and out, skirting deep gorges on crazy bridges—on which most of the sleepers had been gouged out by bushfires. The swaying of the bridge reminded Mick that sometimes sleepers get burnt, the pegs

holding the rails in place get loose in their sockets, the line spreads and 'away goes the "choot-choot" over the — bridge.'

The Javanese boy sat impassive at the controls, a cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth, as we chugged up sidings, through great red-earthed cuttings, and past the poorest country I had seen since arriving in New Caledonia. Practically the only vegetation was a few stunted—mainly dead—niaouli trees, and a poor type of ti-trees.

Just as the hills opened out into level country, and the seat seemed to have made common cause with my tail-bone, we sighted a small tin shed on our right. This marked the terminus of our 'choot-choot' ride. Mick arranged with the Javanese to pick us up a couple of days later, we helped him lift the 'choot-choot' round and point it homewards, then shouldered our swags—and the excursion had really begun.

Our first difficulty was the weight of our swags. With bed-clothes and 12 or 15 pounds each of provisions they were heavy enough, and Mick's experience told him that by the time we had covered 10 or 15 kilometres they would be heavier still. We decided to leave a cache of food in the tin hut, and even if we went short en route, we would have a glorious 'beano' on the night and morning of our return to the terminus.

Mick took a compass reading, and we set off across the plain towards what I was convinced was Mick's gold mine. After about a kilometre of walking we had to strip off our trousers, and made across the coldest strip of water I have ever dipped feet into. Another compass reading by Mick, and within a few hundred yards of the river we struck a well-worn narrow trail. Except for the numerous trees along the banks of the river which we crossed and recrossed several times, the vegetation was mainly waist high reeds, with a lonesome giant kauri tree towering up in splendid isolation.

Mick relaxed his mysterious silence about our destination sufficiently to tell me that we were on the Plaine des Lacs (Plain of Lakes) to which in the old days many escaped convicts had fled, and were either recaptured or lost their way

and died of starvation. After walking fairly solidly for an hour or more, the earth began to take on a more reddish tinge, vegetation became even sparser, and there was no living plant more than a few feet high.

Mick stopped us on a little hillock, where there had been a slight landslide and the subsoil had slipped down, uncovering bare rocks the colour of dried blood, with the same suggestion of red underneath. In a depression in the rocky bottom lay a pool of clear bluish water.

'There y'are,' said Mick. 'That's the beginning of the biggest — iron field in the world. See those rocks, they're dam' near pure iron. What you've been walking over's iron, only it's covered up with silt washed down from the mountains. But that's nothing. That's only the beginning of it.'

We trudged over a few more kilometres of the crumbly red soil, with Mick pointing out new outcrops of iron and signs that showed that iron existed.

'You see these dead trees,' and he snapped off a brittle grey tree that had grown up to five feet and died. 'Know why they can't grow? 'Cause their roots can't do down. They go down a couple of feet, then hit the iron floor and—k-r-a-a-a-k finish. Some of 'em are lucky and find a crack in the iron. But that doesn't last long. They soon hit the solid stuff and that finishes 'em.

'Know why this place is called Plaine des Lacs?'

'I suppose because there's lots of lakes here,' I offered humbly.

'Course there's plenty of lakes here, but why? 'Cause the water can't get away. It just sits there on that iron bottom as safe as if it was in an iron bath tub. Iron—there's millions of tons of it. But you've seen nothing yet.'

That night we camped alongside a small lake. Firewood was no problem with all the stunted dead trees lying about. Mick produced a couple of onions from one of his pockets, and with a little manipulation with beef and fruit tins—we ate the fruit first to provide a billy—he dished up a first rate bully beef and onion stew. With a red coal fire to turn



our feet towards we slept on the hard iron floor with a cool breeze on our faces, and the black sky stabbed with white stars above us.

Next morning we entered the iron field proper. For hours we trudged over solid iron, with hardly a score of stunted trees to the acre. Of grass or reeds there was not a sign. In some places the rusty-coloured iron floor was almost as smooth as if one was walking the docks of a battleship, in others it was broken up into boulders varying from the size of a cricket ball to huge pieces that must have contained many hundreds of tons. In answer to my question as to the depth of the deposit, Mick's hands flung up into the air.

——! it just goes down and down. Wait till we come to a river again. That's the best indication that we've got. No drills necessary here. The river shows everything that she's got.' And with another glance at the compass he shepherded us away from the path and we clambered over rocks and past the dead trees until we reached the banks of a wide river. Priday and I weren't a bit interested in iron until we had stripped off and had a cooler in the icy cold water. I had the feeling that Mick regarded this bathing business as a softness one caught through having lived in big cities.

'Now how deep do yuh reckon's that river?' Mick asked, as we dried ourselves in the sun.

'About ten feet.'

'And how high are these banks?'

'I should reckon about 20 or 30 feet.'

'Well, that's the depth of the iron as far as we know. — knows how much further she goes down below the bottom of the river.'

The river seemed to cut a channel through the centre of the field. Along its banks were huge round boulders of iron, the river bottom was solid iron, and as far as one could see in either direction up and down the river was iron.

'Wherever a river cuts through it, she's like that,' Mick offered. 'That's the only indication we've got of her depth. There's millions and millions of tons of it here. The — engineers that came here said it's the biggest thing of its

kind in the world. They came here and camped on it. Both of them, and I brought 'em here. The first one came and camped out here for nine days with me. We tramped over the whole field, longways, crossways, every — ways. When he had finished he said to me: "Mick, I've seen iron before, in many parts of the world. There's only one thing anywhere like this and that's in Mexico. But this beats it. This is the biggest show that I know of in the world. There's at least 250,000,000 tons in it."

'Well, he went back to Australia and a big crowd over there got interested in it, and they sends an engineer over here. Smart bloke he was too, but no fancy business about him. We come out here and camped just like we done this time. I tried to get out of him what he thought of it, but he kept saying "Mick, you're a seller, but I'm a buyer. I'm not saying anything. I make my report when I get back to Melbourne." So after we had been out here for a few days, I said to him: "Well, the last engineer that was over this field says there's 250,000,000 tons of 55% ore here. What d'yer say to that." An' he said: 'Mick, I don't doubt the tonnage, but I do doubt yer percentage.' So I said: "Well, that's easy proved. Yuh've only gottah take some back with you and prove that.'"

Mick paused for a while, and wiped away the sweat after such a long statement.

'And what did the assay show?'

'She was what we thought all right. —, they had everything fixed to buy it. Never quibbled at the price or anything. All the papers were ready an' all. An' then that — thing happened in France. France pulls out of the war, and the crowd in Melbourne is frightened that they might lose the field after they've shoved their money in. So the thing was called off.'

'And why doesn't someone here work it?'

'She's no good to them here. They've got no coal. Iron's only good when you've got coal. Now this's the way I had it figgered. There's boats comes every week from Newcastle bringing coal over to the Nickel works at Noumea. They

go back to Aussie empty. Why not fill 'em up with iron ore, dump it straight at Newcastle where they've got the coal to turn her into steel, and bring another load of coal back here. There's more iron here than you've got in all Australian fields put together.

'Where does yer iron come from now? Well, I'll tell yer. It comes from Iron Knob in South Aussie. An' its further to take it from Iron Knob to Newcastle than it would be from here. An' she's lovely to get at from here. There's a railway line comes in from Prony Bay right to the start of the field. Prony Bay, why she's the best harbour in Caledonia. 20,000 tonners can come in there without any trouble.'

'But why hasn't somebody been on to this before? It seems funny to me that it's been left lying so long.'

'——, no one knew there was iron in this —— place until the Japs started working their show at Goro in 1939. They knew there was every other mineral here, but no one knew what iron looked like. My pal André Nickols and me, we knew of this stuff because we'd walked over it plenty of times when we was cutting kauri in Prony forest. So when the Japs opened up Cascade, we come over here and pegged this little lot out, and let her lay until we got an engineer over. She's the goods all right, an' I tell you what, the Japs'd give their eyes to have it right now.'

When we got back on to the main field again, Priday was able to supply some technical details about the phenomenal deposits—as he had learned them from competent mining men. It seems that the prevailing rock types in this part of New Caledonia are pyritite, and where there are pyritite rocks, manganese and iron is often present, in large quantities.

The place now occupied by the iron deposits was evidently once a deep valley, lined by pyritite mountains, the tips of which form the boundary of the Plaine des Lacs to-day. Through hundreds of thousands of years, tropical rains have set up warm carbonic gases which gradually dissolved the iron content of the rocks, which settled in the bottom of the valley, gradually filling it up to its present level. A rough idea of the shape of the deposit can be had by imagining a long V-

shaped valley about 30 kilometres long, with the V half filled up with tightly packed iron ore, which has been poured in over a period probably extending over millions of years. The distance across the V varies from 6 to 10 kilometres. On the edges, the iron is covered with an overburden of soil washed down from the mountains, but in the centre it is a level floor of bald hard iron.

Unfortunately we couldn't reach the far end of the field, where the valley widened out and entered the Grand Bay of Prony. This part of the island was taboo, and even had we got there, we might have been isolated there for a few weeks because of the plague. Over the other side of the mountains in front of us was Yaté, where the waters of the Yaté River had been harnessed to provide power for a large hydro-electric scheme. Mick had some interesting information about the Yaté hydro-electric station.

'That's the — Nickel Company again. You know they built that plant to smelt their nickel there, and asked the governor if they could have a concession to use the Yaté waterfalls to provide them with power for their plant. They was told they could have the concession an' it would cost them nothing, only they must agree to put in land lines across to Noumea, and provide the lighting for the town. They figgered that it'd only cost 60 centimes a unit (about 1 penny). Well, what did they do? After they got their plant up, they amalgamated with the Hauts Forneaux crowd that was running the old cobalt smelter at Noumea, and decided it was cheaper to smelt the nickel there.

'Well, the people were waiting for the electric light at Noumea, and the governor asks the Nickel Company when they're going to put their land lines across. The Nickel Co. just tells them to go to —. The deal's off and they're not going to put in any lines. Then they offer to give Noumea electricity anyway, and bring out a bloke from Unelco in France, and he builds a power house. Lighting and power too, costs 3 francs (5 pence) now, and Yaté's lying idle—never been used. Just keep an engineer there to maintain the plant in running order.'

Another night spent under the stars on a cold iron floor, and another day's tramping about on the iron field, which became more impressive the more one saw of it, and we turned back to our terminus. Throughout the three days' excursion, the only signs of any life were pig tracks, and once or twice a grunting scamper as we surprised some wild pigs from their lair.

Back at the terminus we collected the remainder of our food, and made camp for the night in the largest of a dozen thatched huts, which a few years previously had been the headquarters of the Anna Louise nickel mine. As our last day on the iron field had been a foodless one, we were able to enjoy the prodigious meal that Mick turned out of the remaining tins of food. Early next morning we heard the 'choot-choot' labouring up the sidings on its way to pick us up, and soon we were all aboard headed back to La Forestière, on the most reckless and the coldest trip of my life.

Light rain which was falling when we left, turned into a steady downpour, and in a few minutes our saturated shirts were flapping against our stomachs. None of us had coats on and with a spanking wind blowing through the wet cloth of the shirts they were turned into effective refrigerators. To make matters worse, the Javanese didn't seem to be worrying about trying to control the 'choot choot.' After we had negotiated the first half kilometre of level line he switched the engine off and 'let her rip.' Added to the icy prickling coldness was the deafening roar of the wind in our ears, and a sensation like sitting on top of a machine-gun as the trolley wheels hurtled over the joints in the rails. Every now and again there was a screaming rending sound as we lurched around a corner in about seven or eight distinct movements.

Mick roared a few words of encouragement in my ears. 'She's gotta stop when she gets to the bottom. She starts up hill again.' The Javanese sat there as impassive as Buddha, his cigarette, limp and wet, still hanging from his lips. Following protests from Priday and me, Mick shouted something into the Javanese's ear, and with a pitying look at me, the latter pointed to a lever, which he motioned me to pull. After

*Facing Above:* Skulls under the old banyan tree.

*Below:* Clouds over the Chaine Centrale.





Friday and I had used our united strength, leaning back against the lever, we succeeded in easing up the 60 or 70 mile an hour rush. For the rest of the trip we hung on to that lever mighty hard, giving it an extra pull when a bend or bridge came in sight.

Back at the headquarters, the bajous had breakfast prepared for us—and as a tribute to the cold of the morning, the wet of our bodies and our nationality, there was a huge pot of tea ready for us. From La Forestière our taxi was waiting to whisk us back to Noumea, where hot baths soon dissolved the red iron dust out of our bodies.

‘Well, what did you think of her?’ Mick asked a few hours later, under the verandah of the Hotel Centrale.

‘It looks pretty good to me. If the stuff we’ve been walking over is really iron, why I never thought there was so much in the world.’

‘She’s iron all right. An’ what’s more she’d take nothing to work—start on an end where the river’s cut a face in her. Bust up with a few sticks of dynamite an’ yuh can load her into trucks as fast as they can shoot ’em along. They can take it out of there for hundreds of years an’ yet wouldn’t see where they’d been working. Why don’t yuh tell ’em about it when you get back to Aussie? Tell ’em to send somebody over, that knows iron. I’ll show them just what I’ve shown you. Tell ’em if they don’t get it someone else will. I have people nosing about here every few months after that lot. But I want to see Australia working it. It don’t make sense to have this iron here, when you’ve got the coal just over the water in Newcastle. Marry the coal and iron an’ you’ve got steel, and when you’ve got steel you’ve got railway lines, girders for your buildings, plates for your tanks, and sides for your ships. Tell ’em when you get back that we’ve got the biggest thing in the world here, right at Australia’s front door. I know they haven’t got much iron over there. Why even the government expert reckoned yer didn’t have ’more than 25 years’ supply, an’ that was a few years ago. Not that I take much notice of experts. You tell ’em to send somebody over and if they don’t mind roughing



it a bit, why I'll take 'em over and tramp 'em around that field for a —— month if they want to. Let 'em stick down drills, an' see what she's really got, an' if I'm any judge she'll go down hundreds of feet out there in the middle of the field. For —— sake don't forget to tell 'em about it when you get back.'

I hope that Mick will consider that I've adequately presented his case in some half dozen newspaper articles and reports I've written about the Plaine des Lacs iron deposits. At least this chapter is something like a permanent record that I kept my promise to 'tell 'em something about it.'

## THE STORY OF THE NATIVES

WHEN Cook dropped anchor in Balade Bay, he and his men were surprised at the friendly reception accorded them by the natives. They swarmed around the boats in their outrigger canoes, and hailed them as if they had long been expecting this visit. When they clambered on board the strange boats, they showed no signs of fear of these first white visitors to the island, but wandered about peering into the sailors' faces and patting them on the backs and arms with great good humour, as if they were delighted to welcome them.

Lieut. Pickersgill of the *Resolution* recounts that only once during their stay was there any sign of excitement or displeasure among the natives. Cook had invited some of the chiefs and tribal elders on board the *Resolution* to a great feast prepared in their honour. The first part of the meal went off uneventfully, but, according to Pickersgill, 'towards the end of supper, after having seen that some sailors nibbled at bones of beef, the natives started to talk among themselves at the top of their voices—greatly excited. They looked at our people with surprise and disgust, and showed by signs that they suspected them of eating human flesh. We tried to explain—but how could one make oneself understood to people who had never seen quadrupeds in their lives?'

The natives made signs to show that to the north of the island, there were also ill-bred people like Cook and his men, who ate human flesh, but this habit was clearly something of which they mightily disapproved.

Twenty years later, however, when D'Entrecasteaux visited the same spot, he found the natives suspicious, and hostile. The gentle, peace-loving people whom Cook found absolutely trustworthy and friendly were transformed into warlike savages, who stole everything they could lay hands

on, who wore human bones for ornaments and who had to be watched lest they committed treacherous acts against the white sailors.

Some interesting explanations of the contradictory accounts given by D'Entrecasteaux and Cook are contained in an old book written by Charles Brainne one year after the French occupied New Caledonia. He points out that a dictionary of New Caledonia words compiled by Cook was of little use to D'Entrecasteaux, and comes to the conclusion that between the visits of the two great navigators, the cannibal tribes—indicated to Cook as inhabiting the northern part of the island—moved south, and either wiped out or dispossessed the natives, probably of Polynesian origin, whom Cook encountered, and who had such an aversion to cannibalism.

Brainne believes that these warlike tribes gradually moved south absorbing the original inhabitants, and at the time of D'Entrecasteaux's visit they were in the full flush of conquest. In support of this theory one finds that in the south—in the Ile des Pins, and the southern portion of the Loyalty Islands the people have definitely different characteristics to those of the north. They are more gentle, with rounder features, their dances are lascivious rather than warlike, their language softer. Certainly, on parts of the east coast, there are still pockets of Polynesian influence, and these could be explained—either by the fact that the conquering tribes never completely absorbed the original inhabitants, or that the dispossessed tribes fled to the Loyalty Islands, and later returned and succeeded in re-establishing footholds on the mainland.

Probably there were many migrations, and wars of possession and repossession among these pioneer tribes of the Pacific. If, as is generally believed, these first colonists of the Pacific came across from South-East Asia, New Caledonia would be in their direct line of migration. There are Papuan type Melanesians in New Caledonia, identical with those from New Guinea, while among some tribes there

are words and characteristics similar to the Polynesians of New Zealand and French Oceania.

If the original inhabitants were Polynesians, it would explain the disgust with which the natives watched the meat-eating English sailors. To them, such meat and such large bones could only be of human origin. The Polynesians were never cannibals in the accepted sense of the term. The highest caste warriors ate certain parts of their enemies killed in battle, in the belief that the virtues of courage and strength of the dead warrior would be transferred to them. Cannibalism with the Polynesians was a ritual almost identical with the Christian rite of taking the sacrament. The Melanesians, on the other hand, ate human flesh because they liked it. 'Long pig' was a relished item of food, apart from feasting on their enemies killed in battle. Human flesh was looked on by some tribes as a justifiable food substitute during years of drought.

Louise Michel, the Communard deportée, in her collection of native legends, *Légendes et Chants de Gestes Canaques*, leaves a revealing account of the beginning of cannibalism—as recounted by the natives themselves. The following two stories are among many which she heard, explaining the 'fall' of the natives. Without strain, there is surely an analogy, first with the Biblical story of the Flood, then with that of the brothers Cain and Abel.

'Long ago, one really ate men; and then more moons passed, more moons than there are stars, when one didn't eat men. After that it began again. There were the times of the Great Hunger, other times of the Great Anger. Since long past, this now happens but rarely, only during a war, when Anger bites hard... There came a good time, with plenty to eat. This was before the great, great cyclone came.

'Then, in front of the huts, by night, they told the story of a time when the fish would cause death because of the flower of the coral, and when banana trees and coconut palms would break down by the wind of death; then those who were stronger and had greater hunger ate the others, so that they themselves might not die. One who heard the

story said, without thinking, that this time would come back, and there were bad ears that listened to him ; such were the ears of Téchea :

‘One Téchea, whose name has ever since signified “bad,” contemplated by himself the eating of human flesh. He had a strong lust to do that. When he was very small, he took the fruit away from his brother Kéron, whose name means “good,” ever since. He ate the fruit in front of Kéron, or when he wasn’t hungry, he threw them at him.

‘Téchea often spoke with others like himself, but old Koué (Rising Tide) warned him not to do anything bad. Téchea only laughed at that. He was strong and tall. One had rarely seen a man of such figure. Many years passed before anything happened.

‘Téchea and Kéron had thrown the bamboo comb at the beautiful Kaméa ; so beautiful that one called her “the sun.”

‘Kaméa took Kéron’s comb together with his flowers and put it in her hair, but left that of Téchea on the ground.

‘Kéron loved Kaméa too, and would have fought for her.

‘It was a year of harvests, and there was a pilou-pilou near the place where the diahot (river) flows into the sea, at the foot of the mountain d’Arama.

‘Kéron, seeing his brother hadn’t said anything, was touched, and went to him, but Kaméa turned away and led all her people behind some coconut palms.

‘Then the dance commenced. Old Koué was uneasy. “Take your sagaies (spears),” he said to those who danced the pilou-pilou, “something is going to happen.” But no-one listened to him.

‘Three times Koué repeated the warning. The first time they danced, the second time they sang, the third time it was too late. Téchea and his people fell on the tribe.

‘Their casse-têtes (clubs) were like birds’ beaks, clubs such as one had never seen before, but since that time similar ones were made. (The bec d’oiseau—the bird-beak—club, was very popular among the Melanesians).

‘Soon there were no living except women, very old men and small children.

‘Kéron had his chest laid open at the first blow.

‘They never threw down green branches as a sign of mourning, but made holes with burning hot stones at the bottom, and the youngest and fattest tribesman was rolled in great banana leaves and laid on the stones.

‘Téchea had bound Kaméa to a tree. He wanted her as his wife.

‘The women and children didn’t dare to cry, and the old men stuffed their throats with earth that they might suffocate.

‘Night passed. Morning dawned white over the blood-soaked bush.

‘The old Koué was not killed. He went to Téchea just as the first ouainth (meal) of human flesh was to commence, and cursed him.

‘While Téchea pursued the old man, Kaméa tore off the cords that held her to the tree and escaped. Since she was the daughter of brave people, she threw herself on the Kouindio (reef).

‘And all the old men and Koué cursed Téchea until he became afraid, and let Koué go. Since then the warriors never put their sagaies aside at their festivals.

‘The story of the red ouainth was told to the children. Koué told it, too. But it couldn’t be helped. Man had tasted human flesh. He had drunk blood, and wanted always to drink it.

‘Téchea made himself Théama (great chief) of the tribes, and when there were great pilou-pilous, and the tayos danced round the fire before the popinées, he would take two or three, and eat them in the morning, with his warriors.

‘Many others did like him, and to-day there are many Théamas who have sold to the whites the strongest of their tribe, and the most beautiful girls to serve them, but may he who caused the first ouainth of human flesh be none the less cursed for it.’

In documents left by some of the earliest settlers on the island one finds explanation for the expectant interest with

which the first whites were received. The complicated religious belief of the Caledonians allowed for just such an apparition as the arrival of Cook and his men. Apart from the simplest belief in good and bad, with its manifestations of day and night, life and death, the natives also believed in the immortality of the soul. Certain of the tribes were taught by their 'T'katas' (sorcerers or priests), that after death, the soul or intellectual part assumed mortal form and departed to Balabea, a small island nine miles off the east coast, where lived a Dhianoua (evil spirit). Through a hole in the rock, the spirits, clad in mortal form, entered a Paradise, where there was plenty of taro, ripe bananas, ignames, everything which a native could desire. Here they would remain, happy and contented, with all the food and ornaments one could imagine. Eventually, however, the powers of dark would become too strong for them, and while the Dhianoua pretended to be asleep they would steal from him. The Dhianoua then would awaken, and chase them, and beat them to death. They became simple shadows of their original human form, and being now immortal, return to the mainland, walking through the villages at night, whispering into the ears of the old women, giving them secret information about the thieves that steal from the village plantations, and the sex of the baby which is shortly to be born.

In the day-time the natives like to meet them, but not so much at night, because one can't know whether it is the ghost of one's friend that one meets or the evil Dhianoua. When the wind rustles through the palm fronds at night or the waves crash down on the reef, that is almost certainly the Dianoua walking about.

When Cook arrived, it was easy for the T'kata to explain to his tribe that Cook and his men were simply metamorphosed manifestations of their deceased relatives, and thus it was quite logical that the natives should crowd around the sailors peering into their faces, trying to discover some feature or characteristic, that identified them with

the dear departed. They were convinced that the whites were kindly phantoms.

'Our so apparent superiority,' writes Captain Lecomte, one of the first to make a study of the natives' religious beliefs, 'sustains them in this idea, particularly with regard to the commandants and officers, and especially missionaries, who, every day, surprise them with new and unforeseen deeds, and who have obtained great influence by the fear they inspire—although they never did anything but good for them....'

Despite the century of missionary activity the belief in the Dhianoua is still strong. In many parts of the island the natives are still scared to move out after dark, and when they do, they usually go in groups, with their hands clasped. They still have a strong belief in the supernatural, and in this connection M. Ratzel, former Chief of Police in New Caledonia, describes a curious form of spiritualistic seance practised among some of the tribes.

During a visit to the interior of the colony, M. Ratzel, accompanied by a native guide, stayed overnight at a home where the inmates held the half-mocking, half-earnest views on spiritualism shared by so many people to-day. The usual ritual of hands under the table was carried out, and as the table lifted up off the floor and swayed about seemingly without human agency, M. Ratzel noticed that the native squatting in the corner had his hands pressed over his eyes, and was mumbling away, half-terrified. He spoke to him in native dialect.

'You've never seen anything like that before, eh?'

'But yes, chief. That's big religion. That's not to laugh at.'

'You've seen it before?'

'In my tribe we do same thing, but in a different way.'

The next time he was in the region of that particular tribe, M. Ratzel asked his guide to take him along and show him how the natives conducted their seance. Instead of a table, the natives used a long pole, carved with religious symbols, about which the natives clasped their hands, one



above the other, whereupon the pole behaved in an extraordinary manner, jumping about from one side of the room to another, dragging the excited natives this way and that. After this had gone on for some time, the local wise man had no trouble in contacting the dead, or conjuring up spirits.

The tabu, of course, was the chief manifestation of religion in New Caledonia, and in the primitive conditions there, it provided a clear example of how customs, originally introduced to protect the people, became diverted into exploiting them. The tabu was applied originally for natural reasons, and was similar enough to the old Hebraic laws. Women, during and after childbirth up till the time the babies were weaned, were tabu, also during the period of menstruation; a married woman was tabu to other men; burial grounds were tabu—to prevent spread of disease from which the sick died, and the tabu was generally applied as a minimum necessity to regulate the social life of the tribes.

Gradually, however, the chiefs and sorcerers capitalized on the value of the fear inspired by the tabu, and used it to place objects they themselves desired out of reach of the ordinary people. Thus, when the first white traders came, the richest coconut plantations or sandalwood forests were placed under tabu, so that the chief could first use the tabu as a bargaining lever with the traders, telling them that these plantations or forests were tabu and thus more valuable—and then securing sole right of sale, when the price became high enough.

The act of declaring tabu varied among different tribes, but usually consisted in the simple act of tying a stick with a few strands of flying fox hair, or making a mark with red clay on the object which was to be designated. Violation of the tabu meant quick death for the law-breaker.

The old social structure of the tribes has now largely been broken down to the simple division between Grand Chief and ordinary tribesman. Each village has a chief, and each group of villages comprises a tribe governed by a Grand

Chief, who now constitutes something approximating our provincial mayor.

In the old days the tribal chiefs or Théas had supreme power. They could declare war or make peace, inflict punishment, negotiate treaties with the neighbouring tribes, and generally act as the all-powerful monarch. Only males were allowed to rule, and if the chief had no male issue he was permitted to adopt a son who could succeed him as chief. The adopted son, however, was not permitted to marry an adopted sister, even if they were from different villages. An interesting thing is that although noblesse was hereditary, it had a diminishing value. In each generation they lose one degree of rank, so that after the sixth generation the issue of a Grand Chief would become a simple tribesman. A parallel to this can be seen in Thailand to-day, where through six generations a Chao Phya—the highest rank—descends by degree to the status of Nai or ordinary citizen.

A custom that was current in the island when Charles Brainne wrote *La Nouvelle Calédonie* in 1854, seems to have close relation to a custom practised about the same time in Tahiti. When a chief received the head of a neighbouring tribe in New Caledonia, it was the usual thing to welcome him with a long speech, during which he would pass through his hands an 'ava' (a length of cloth made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree). The longer the speech, and the quicker the material passed through his hands, the greater the prestige of the chief, whose wealth was gauged by the size of the piece of cloth.

In Tahiti the thing was done much more gracefully. During the welcoming ceremony, a beautiful Polynesian maiden entered the feasting hall. Her body was swathed in cloth, which had been patiently beaten out from the bark of the purau tree by hundreds of her sisters and friends. As she gyrated voluptuously round the hall, the end of the cloth was flung to the honoured guest, and the dancing girl pirouetted away from him, unfolding the cloth, until she was left to dance naked before the assembly, and the cloth was given as a present to the guest.

One humane custom among the Melanesians—one that would be regarded with horror by most males—was that the eldest son of the family was expected to marry his sister-in-law, if the latter's husband died and she had no children to support her. This was not quite as bad as it sounds, as polygamy, was extensively practised among the natives, and the sister-in-law could be merely added to a string of wives. Marriages, incidentally, were only rarely arranged by the parents, and very often the children even married without asking their parents' consent. A married woman was expected to be faithful to her husband; if not, she and her children were likely to be driven out from the family hut. She was permitted to marry again, however, and retain the children of the first marriage.

For a really handsome Melanesian, two things are essential. First, that the forehead should be narrow and receding; second, that the nose should be flat. When the baby is born, therefore, there is a great ceremony. Neighbours bring fruit and presents, and there is a pilou-pilou of a size proportionate to the importance of the child's father. While the food is cooking, the wise women of the tribe spread some warm ashes on the soil, roll the child in them and press its nose and forehead into the desired shape. When the little scalp is almost touching the eyebrows, the head tapering from the ears to an apex on the dome of the cranium, the bridge of the nose pressed down so that the nose is a little brown blob of flesh, the plastic surgeons are satisfied that they have faithfully fulfilled their task, and little Kaké will grow up the envy of his fellows, and beloved of the Gods.

If he starts to cry, why, one just throws some cold water over him, if he can't sleep, one puts him on the floor on a mat, and taking each end of the mat, rolls him to and fro until he dozes off. When mother goes to work in the plantations, baby goes on her back, curled up in a little niaoulibark shield, with a foot at the bottom to prevent him from slipping out. From the time he stops drinking at his mother's

breast, he is reckoned old enough to be left at home on his own, to amuse himself as best he can.

As soon as his legs can carry him, he goes to the taro and igname fields, armed with a pointed stick; he helps his parents to dig holes wherein to plant the sweet potatoes, and poles to take their trailing vines when they start to shoot. Eight months later, he will take his pointed stick again, and help to root out the twisted, fantastic-shaped sweet potatoes, and beat the earth to fine dust again, to prepare for next year's crop. He grows up, wise in the way of coaxing a livelihood from the generous earth—and wise in the ways of men, because no actions are hidden from him by his elders.

When the age of puberty arrives, Kaké features in another ceremony even more important than the nose and forehead-shaping one. The time has come for him to be circumcized—an act carried out to the accompaniment of general rejoicings and another pilou-pilou. After this he can carry a stick about with him, as a tribute to his manhood. He can now regard all *popinées*—including his mother—as inferior beings. Hints will be thrown out that it's time he chose a wife. When he marries, there will be another great pilou-pilou, and so on till the arrival of his first-born, when the cycle commences over again.

The last festival arranged for Kaké is one in which he plays a passive part. In the old days, it was rare for a native to die naturally. Before the death agony set in, it was usual for the medicine man to come and finish him off. Sometimes the sick one even asked a member of his family to do it, when he knew that death was near. To make sure the patient was dead, he was usually given an extra tap on the head with a *casse-tête* before he was interred. His legs were bent and tied together, and, trussed like a fowl, with arms bound to the knees, the body was wrapped in bark cloth, and set in a sitting-up position, surrounded by presents in the village burial ground.

In other tribes it was the custom to take the sick out to the banyan tree and leave them there to die, but it seems

that this was the case with the coastal tribes more than with those living in the interior.

After the funeral ceremony there was an official crying period, at which the elderly women played the chief role. This was followed by a feast and pilou-pilou, as the final tribute to the dead tribesman.

Julien Bernier, who, at the end of last century, made a special study of the language of the New Caledonians, discovered that there were about twenty native dialects in use, and that many of the tribes could not understand their neighbours, even though they were separated only by a river. In many cases the differences were only due to a variation of the same language, but he was able to divide them into three main groups, corresponding to what he believed were three distinct racial groups.

The fact that in some tribes there were two different languages—one spoken by the chiefs and another by the common people—at the time of the French occupation of the island, lends strength to the view that migrations were actually taking place at that time, and that the conquering tribes—as represented by the chiefs—were in the process of imposing their language on that of the conquered.

According to Bernier's theory it was the Polynesians and not the Melanesians who were the last to arrive on the islands. He quoted Gélina, the Chief of Canala, who came to the assistance of the French during the native revolt, as saying that his family was of foreign origin. Gélina's brother called a woman 'fafiné,' which is very near to the Polynesian word 'vahiné,' while the Melanesian word is 'sien.'

Bernier has a southern group extending from Ile des Pins up to a line between Tontouta and Port Bouquet, and including Goro, Yaté and Ounia, a central group extending along both sides of the coast as far as Ponérihouen on the East Coast, and up to Poya on the West Coast. The third group runs north from a line between Poya and Ponérihouen. The boundaries of the three groups correspond roughly to the natural boundaries that run herring-bone wise towards

the coast between Tontouta and Port Bouquet, and Ponérihoun and Poya.

A complete study of the origin of the New Caledonians has yet to be made, but it seems certain, by the notes and documents left us by some of the earliest white inhabitants, that scientific research into their past would help to clear up much of the mystery regarding the origins and settlement of the South Sea islands as a whole. Whether, as some believe, the New Caledonians have common origin with the Australian aborigines and were separated when the land bridge between the two countries subsided; whether they were part of a race which migrated from the South American countries, gradually to filter across the South Seas; whether they really did sweep down from South-East Asia and make New Caledonia a base from which to populate the other island of Melanesia; whether the Polynesians came first and were driven out by the Melanesians, or came later and established settlement in spite of the Melanesians—these are much debated questions yet to be solved.

Not only could the mystery of the early South Sea colonists be cleared up, but also much of the story of humanity itself. In New Caledonia we can see in operation to-day processes that the so-called civilized nations passed through thousands of years ago. In their primitive tabus we can find the origin of our own religious customs, in their rudimentary, utilitarian language the basis of our own speech. Even if their past remains wrapped in obscurity, scientists and psychologists to-day can study in New Caledonia the processes through which the mind passed to reach the present stage of high development, while philologists have a fertile field to observe the growth of language from a clumsy tool expressing basic necessities, to the present high level where it becomes a flexible instrument capable of expressing the finest nuances which the ultimate development of thought makes possible.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DAY OF THE NOUMEAN

THE day of a Noumean begins early. First of all there is the marketing to be done, not that this concerns the bulk of the white population. They usually send their 'bayous' (Javanese) or 'Congais' (Tonkinese) to do the day's shopping. Shopping at the market is an institution one finds in all French colonies—and most towns in France itself—but Noumea's market is the most original I have seen. About half an hour before daybreak, Japanese gardeners' carts begin assembling in a triangular-shaped open space, just alongside the Place des Cocotiers. Within a few minutes, they erect stands and tables and begin laying out their wares. By the time the first rays of daylight are stealing through the flamboyants in the Place the market-place is a hive of industry. Trim, neatly dressed Javanese, swinging their string bags, and still each with a sleepy-eyed baby strapped to her back or slung round in front so that it can drink at the mother's breast while she walks along, compete for the best bargains with giggling popinées, hideous in their shapeless Mother Hubbard dresses that hang straight from neck to breast and then drop down like a bell tent to the ankles, prudishly hiding the shapely figures that many of the Melanesian girls have. The missionaries must have been terribly tempted by the smiling popinées to have had their lines and body so effectively covered.

The Javanese saunter along, picking over the morning's produce at their leisure, while the popinées stand around in groups holding hands and getting the maximum of merriment out of the slightest incident, ranging from the merest ripple of a giggle if a vegetable drops off the stand, to a hurricane of laughter which threatens to snap their swaying bodies in two like a coconut palm if a Japanese slips off the tailboard of his cart, or a fish jumps out of its water box.

*Facing Above:* Village Children.

*Below:* Three habitués of the place.







The Tonkinese women are more businesslike. They walk briskly along, asking the price of this with a few terse words, critically examining that, and generally getting the pick of the market and hastening home again. Laid out under giant arbres noirs, the stalls look attractive enough, piled up with mounds of white turnips, heliotrope aubergine (egg-plant), red carrots, with black sand still clinging to them, the inevitable mountains of green 'salade'—the nearest approach to lettuce one can get in the islands—great bundles of leeks, and a few crimson chillies for colour contrast. Ignames (sweet potatoes), 'taro' (starchy native root crop), and a few breadfruit are laid out especially to tempt the native buyers.

The fish market is a sorry exhibition for a town the size of Nouméa, especially considering that the lagoons and river mouths are teeming with fish. Two or three large boxes mounted on bicycle wheels are wheeled along and backed into the kerb. No fish may be sold at Nouméa unless it is still alive, so they are displayed still swimming about in these boxes, kept about three parts filled with water. You select your fish, a native dives his hand in and pulls it out, slapping and whacking away with fins and tail, then weighs it on a hanging scales and you bargain over the price. Your choice is then attached to a string and borne away still flapping its slimy tail against your trousers or skirt, just to prove that it is still fresh.

On a bench opposite the fish tub will be a pile of rocky-looking oysters and a few unhappy looking bleary-eyed crabs and crayfish, their pincers neatly bound with string, so that one can inspect them at close range without difficulty. With your day's supply of food suspended from strings or picked into string bags, you cross the street to a Japanese café and drink an early morning cup of coffee with rolls—and the inevitable guava jelly. If it's your first visit to the market and you linger too long over the coffee, you will be greatly surprised when you step out into the street again. There will be no sign of market or marketers. Within about two hours of the setting up of the stalls.

everything is cleared away so rapidly and thoroughly that the 7 o'clock office-goers would never know a market had been there.

At Tahiti, with only half the population of New Caledonia, the array of gorgeously coloured and fantastically shaped fish at the market is twenty times as large as that at Noumea. At Tahiti the roofed-in market place is a social centre where one goes to meet—if not the best people—at least their servants. On Sundays in Tahiti the whole population puts on its best clothes and travels by bus or on foot to the market place, and first buying flowers to wear in their hair, make their marketing an excuse for meeting their old loves, carrying on new flirtations, and selecting their partners for a day's pleasure making. In New Caledonia it is a much more serious affair, and once the day's purchases have been made the market is a thing to be forgotten and banished with all possible speed.

I had been in Noumea for a long time before I discovered that there is another market, much less formal than that held under the flamboyants and 'arbres noirs' at Place du Marché. Three or four times a week native boats come in from the Loyalty Islands, bringing bananas, plantains and other good things, which are sold with much good humour and laughter down at the Noumean quay-side. The Loyalty Islanders have a high percentage of Polynesian blood in their veins, and are consequently handsomer, according to European standards, than the Melanesians. They lack, too, the heaviness and sombreness of the New Caledonians.

Their strong Polynesian influence has made them great sea-farers and they are much in demand for boat crews for Pacific traders. Until the Japanese entered the vegetable growing business, the Loyalty Islands were the market gardens for New Caledonia. Most of the fruit and vegetables sold in Noumea were ferried across in outrigger canoes from Lifou, Maré and Uvea, the three islands comprising the Loyalty group. Even now, whenever there is a shortage in Noumea it is the Loyalties that come to the rescue, their fertile soil and industrious natives producing crops all the

year round. When the word goes round that a Loyalty boat is in, a crowd soon gathers in expectation at the wharf, and the bunches of taro, great stalks of bananas and plantains, bamboo baskets of ignames, and bundles of sugar cane are sold as soon as they reach the wharves.

The traveller in New Caledonia has to rise with the marketers, for Messageries Automobiles, which provide practically the only road transport service to the interior, arrange for their cars to leave Nouméa at 5-30 a.m. so that the 30-odd kilometres of their daily run along the east or west coast can be comfortably accomplished—and still allow their clients a short midday siesta. I was very impressed by the democracy of the New Caledonian motor service. Seats are allotted strictly in accordance with the order in which they were booked, regardless of the rank, race or colour of the voyager.

My first trip by Messageries Automobiles was to La Foa, and on the morning arranged for my departure I arrived a few minutes before 5-30 a.m., and as no one was in the service bus, I clambered aboard to secure the best seat. Within a few minutes an official politely requested me to leave the car and join the crowd waiting on the kerb. Soon after another official armed with a sheet of paper appeared and began to read out from a list of names. As each name was called a passenger stepped forward, pointed out his baggage to a pair of waiting natives, and after seeing them safely pack it away, climbed into the seat allotted him. We were a mixed crowd. Some were obviously tourists like myself, others were returning to the interior after a holiday in the metropolis.

Seated behind me at a window seat was a little Javanese boy, whose mother wept over him as she fixed his beret more firmly over his black hair. A couple of elderly English ladies climbed in, and seeing no more window seats available, motioned imperiously to the little Javanese to get over into the back seat and make way for them—not caring that he would see nothing from the back. Through the glass screen, the Javanese mother shook her head at the little fellow, and

he clung tightly to the window ledge and showed no signs of moving. One of the elderly ladies, with an exasperated air, tapped on the glass for the official to come and remove the troublesome little boy, and I was considering taking him on my knee when to my surprise the official made it clear that as the little boy had his seat booked earlier he was entitled to sit in it. Much to my wicked amusement, the ladies were placed next to a native soldier whose wife had her very expansive bosom bared, with a curly-haired youngster bucking and scrabbling with his fingers as he had his early morning meal *à la nature*.

The ladies had their revenge on me later in the evening, when I was waiting at the side of the road at La Foa for the 'service' to take me back to Noumea. As it drew alongside I could see the prim faces of the old dears exaggeratedly white amongst the surrounding crowd of natives and bronzed 'broussards.' The driver leaned out and informed me that I was unlucky. I hadn't specified the date of my return journey and the bus was full. I fancy I noticed a satisfied smirk on the faces of the old ladies, as the 'service' continued on its way, leaving me stranded at La Foa for the night. I am very much afraid that in most countries the driver would have told a native to get out and make way for the lordly white, even if the native had paid the same fare.

This chapter seems to stray now and again from its main purpose of telling something about the way of life in Noumea. For domestics the day begins at market-time, and market-time varies according to the season. Usually, however, the domestics are just returning from market as the manual workers are on their way to commence work at 6 o'clock. By 7 o'clock the day has commenced in earnest for the great bulk of the population, manual workers having already been on the job for an hour, and all business houses have their doors open—even including the bank and post office. School has already started.

Within another half hour the Javanese and Tonkinese domestics have been transformed into nurses, and are gathered together in the Place, under the shade of the flam-

boyants, exchanging experiences—either of their mistresses or of their lovers of the previous night—now and again casting an eye at their pale charges running about with their own bronze youngsters in the park. If it's a wet day, they will be sitting about in the bandstand—where the thwarted Pitavy conducted his convict band to the horror of righteous people—chatting away, and taking care that their charges don't wander out beyond the confines of the bandstand to get wet in the park.

At 11 a.m. the town has a brief moment of extreme liveliness as bicycles and motor cars pour along the main streets, bearing their owners home to lunch. Lunch follows the established French procedure. From the simplest home to the best hotel, it consists of hors d'oeuvres, a light meat or fish dish, vegetables served separately, main meat dish, a few leaves of 'salade' soured in vinegar and oil, a piece of cheese and a cup of black coffee. One has the impression of eating a tremendous amount, because of the number of courses, but as these are usually just impressions of courses, one doesn't eat so much after all.

One thing that surprises most visitors to Noumea is that very little use is made by Europeans of the native foods. In fact one has the feeling that there is the same absurd objection to eating native food in New Caledonia as there is in eating coolie food—rice—in the rice-growing countries. In Tahiti it is to a large extent the same. The best foods of the island are despised by most of the white population as 'nigger food,' and even the natives themselves often prefer to buy some patent food rather than use the natural island products.

Restaurant proprietors in Noumea apologize if they have to serve sweet potatoes, instead of the imported potatoes from Australia. Meat, including imported pork, is eaten to a great extent, while fish is a luxury dish which rarely appears more than once a week on the menu. Although the food in Noumea is good, and the meat of excellent quality, most travellers are disappointed, because they expect to eat some-

thing different in a country which can offer such a variety of fruits and vegetables.

One doesn't linger long over coffee after lunch, but usually hastens away to perform the sacred rite of 'La sieste.'

Soon after 1-30 p.m. shutters are taken down, and people begin to rub the sleep out of their eyes as business opens again and the second half of the day begins. By 4-30 the manual workers are drifting back home, and at 5-30 businesses are shut and the same scramble of Renaults, Citroens and bicycles sets in for a few minutes until the business people are transferred to their respective homes.

By 6-30 people are beginning to appear again, but this time they saunter along leisurely to the hotels to celebrate the second sacred rite in the course of the day—the 'heure de l'apéritif.'

The 'heure de l'apéritif' is one of the most pleasant hours of the day in any French colony, and in New Caledonia, where social life is at a minimum, it is particularly appreciated. Friends gather at tables set out under the palms, or under a verandah overlooking the Place des Cocotiers, and sip their 'quinquina' or 'pernod' as they discuss the latest scandal, or the most recent war news. While the clouds begin to mass for a beautiful south sea sunset, and the palms are moving ever so slightly in the breeze, the local radio station begins its musical session and for an hour there is almost perfect peace. As the time for dinner draws near a few Javanese hurry—yes, actually hurry—by, with something that looks like a long white thermos flask swinging from a handle in their hands. They are taking dinner home for 'Patron.' The courses are contained separately in five or six white enamel dishes which sit one on top of the other, keeping each other warm. It is quite usual in New Caledonia to have your dinner cooked at the restaurant and send the 'bajou' for it when meal-time arrives.

At the most, the apéritif drinkers will take two glasses of whatever they are drinking. Although the French drink a fair amount of alcohol, their drinking habits are very regular and not excessive—a glass or two of something

light as apéritif or appetiser, a half litre of very light wine to help the meal down; on occasion perhaps a cognac or creme de cacao after the meal. They are horrified by the indiscriminate drinking in Australia, and find our habit of having to rush into a hotel for a few minutes and drink as much beer as possible before closing time incomprehensible. Incidentally, since the interruption of trade relations with France, New Caledonians have been drinking Australian wines, which they like very well. Their only complaint is that they contain too much alcohol.

Dinner is usually a leisurely meal, and follows the same procedure as lunch, except that the hors d'oeuvres are replaced by scup. Radio Nouméa outdoes itself at dinner time in providing a choice selection of Tino Rossi and George Thill records, and then just as the meal is entering its last stages, conversation dies away as 'La Voix de l'Australie' comes on the air, giving the latest news and comment 'especially for the benefit of our listeners in New Caledonia.' Dinner may last up till 8-30 or 9 p.m., and is usually followed by a short tum in the park and then 'early to bed.'

The pleasure seekers will not find much organized entertainment in Nouméa. If one wants a little variety, a taxi, for 15 to 20 francs—according to your bargaining stamina—will whisk you out to the lovely strip of sandy beach at Anse Vata, and after a moonlight swim in the long rollers that cream along the half mile of beach, you can dine and dance at the famous Anse Vata cabaret. In the warm summer evenings you will have to go early, especially if it's moonlight, because Anse Vata is a very popular place, only six or seven kilometres from Nouméa, and you would certainly find the cabaret crowded out if you arrived late.

Those who prefer more conventional entertainment can visit any one of Nouméa's three picture houses—there are never three showing on the one night, naturally. Usually one finds more entertainment in watching the reactions of the native and Javanese spectators than watching the pictures. Cowboy pictures are the most popular, and as the action reaches its climax the audience gets to its feet. When the



'Injuns' are finally routed by the dashing cowboys, and the heroine—firmly thrown across his saddle—is whisked out of harm's way, the whistling, shouting and jeering knows no bounds.

Awes confided to me that her favourite pictures were silent Tom Mix shows. French as spoken by movie stars is impossible for the Javanese or Tonkinese to understand, and the sound of it only confuses them when they want to concentrate all their faculties on the action of the picture.

The great event in the life of the natives is a band concert in the Place des Cocotiers. Shades of the convict band! The first intimation I had of the importance of such an event was when Awes came into my room about 6 o'clock one evening and took my shoes away to clean them. When I asked her why, her big brown eyes opened wide:

'Mais vous ne savez pas que l'on va jouer dans la Place ce soir?'

'Who is going to play in the park?' I asked.

'C'est la bande. Va jouer musique dans la Place.'

'But why are you cleaning my shoes?'

She put them down with disgust, as if she would never make this stupid Australian understand what she was saying. She put her hands on her hips, leaned her head forward, and said most emphatically:

'Mais quand on joue la musique dans la Place tout le monde est là. Il faut aller. Vous. Allez!' and this last command seemed so imperative that after dinner that evening I put aside my writing and went.

Awes was right when she said everybody goes when the band plays in the Place. Half an hour before it was due to start, a great crowd had gathered there. Most of the whites, looking very white in their duck and sun helmets, had seats, but the native population were much better pleased to walk about, and display the wondrous array of clothing in which they were garbed. The Melanesians had on their best gala dress. The men had their hair bleached an even stickier yellow than ever, their heads were crowned with freshly plucked ferns and creepers, and their shoulders were

draped with the brightest bandolier of woollen threads that they possessed. Some, more fortunate than others, had nickel whistles attached to their bandoliers, and these were blown as occasion demanded. The young *popinées*, their faces shining with virtue and coconut oil, and dressed in their monstrous Mother Hubbards which flattened out any attractive lines in their bodies, were out for conquests.

Javanese men were the most spectacularly dressed, with robes like Roman togas hung over their shoulders, some with fez-like caps made of black felt, others with silk turbans. They seemed to have collected every odd raiment of clothing imaginable, from bed-sheets to dragon embroidered pyjamas. Their women folk were more quietly dressed, their slim waists swathed in the loveliest of their beautifully patterned sarongs, with short bolero jackets emphasizing their perfect figures. As soon as the band began to play, a sort of gigantic jolly miller was set in operation, two gigantic wheels of people, with the bandstand as their hub, moving in opposite directions talking, shouting, whistling, moving slowly enough to scrutinize the faces of those that passed. No one seemed to pay the slightest attention to the music. It was only incidental, the excuse for the occasion, a dim background to the parade.

Dark eyes flashed and white teeth smiled as some of the spokes of the opposite moving wheels halted for a while, then moved off again—but in the same direction. Band night is above all the night for the *popinées*. Groups of them wandered about hand in hand, barefooted, and when they saw their man they didn't easily let him escape. Unfortunately, the concert on this night ended in a sudden terrific downpour of rain, which sent people rushing for the shelter of nearby verandahs—and courting couples inside the cafés and debit bars to continue their love-making over a glass of cognac or a cup of coffee.

The only other entertainment in Nouméa worth mentioning is an occasional native boxing match. I must confess I was appalled at the only exhibition of this sort that I saw. The natives are tremendously strong and can withstand an

enormous amount of punishment, but they are never trained, and have little stamina. For the first two or three rounds they go at it hammer and tongs, slogging each other, giving and taking hits full on the face and jaw hard enough to kill most men, but seemingly without any effect. By the fourth or fifth round, however, both combatants are usually hanging on to each other, with salivary lips and bloodshot eyes, breathing in obvious pain. They seem to have no wind at all, and the fights which I saw all ended with both combatants absolutely exhausted, neither having sufficient energy to deal the 'coup de grace' to his pathetically weak opponent. Here again the best entertainment is had by the onlooker. The audience is mainly comprised of natives, who in a very mild way bet on the results of the various bouts, support for a particular candidate usually depending on the relations between the tribe he represents and those who predominate in the audience. The excitement at the boxing tourneys is terrific. The roars and groans in half a dozen Melanesian dialects would do justice to an audience twenty times as large.

The boxers get about 20 francs if they win and 10 francs if they lose, 3/- and 1/- respectively, which seems a trifle inadequate in respect of the cut lips, puffed up eyes and bruised muscles they collect for their evening's work.

The chief entertainment for whites in Noumea is a very rare horse race at St. Louis, or an even rarer ball at the Town Hall. This latter is a splendid affair, with gallant officers of the garrison in 'grand tenue,' and lovely ladies out for conquests, employing more refined methods than the primitive popinées at the band concert.

SEPTEMBER 1940. THE COLONISTS TAKE  
THE LAW INTO THEIR HANDS

To write a book on New Caledonia in 1941 and not mention the upheaval which took place in September, 1940, would be to omit the highlight of the whole exciting history of the island. The revolt which followed the downfall of France in June, 1940, was something much more fundamental than a division between pro- and anti-Vichy elements; and its results will have permanent bearing on the colony long after Vichy and non-Vichy Frenchmen have reconciled their differences. Whatever happens to the rest of the French Empire, it is fairly certain that New Caledonia will never again revert to her former status as a mere dependency of France.

The position of New Caledonia up to June, 1940, was similar to that of other French colonies. It was ruled by a governor appointed by the French Minister of Colonies, assisted by a Privy Council formed by the Secretary-General, the Procurer (the head of the juridical administration) the Commander-in-Chief of the island forces, the head of the Department of Land and Colonisation, and two leading citizens appointed directly from Paris. Apart from the Privy Council there was the Conseil-Général, a local parliament elected by secret ballot of the white French population and half-caste citizens who had completed their military service.

The Conseil Général was more in the nature of an advisory than an actual executive body. It could be dissolved by the Governor at any time, so that the government of the colony was—in effect—controlled from Paris. The deputy who represented New Caledonia in the Chamber of Deputies had usually never seen the colony, and New Caledonia was just tacked on to some electorate in France as of no account.

Most of the civil service positions in the colony were occupied by 'metropolitains,' as the New Caledonians called them—functionaries sent out from France. In general these were disliked by the local population, as also were those businesses which enjoyed certain monopolies—and were merely branch offices of firms in France. The main grievances against the business houses was that they used their influence to have high tariffs placed on foodstuffs and other goods, at the expense of the general public. Flour and butter, for instance, which could have been supplied so easily by Australia, were subject to heavy duty, because certain business interests preferred to supply these commodities from the Mother country.

The 'metropolitains' were usually regarded in the colony as 'tourists,' who made the 'Grand tour du Monde' at the expense of the colonial peoples. A few years in Algeria, then round to the romantic Caribbean Sea—at Martinique for another few years. Through Panama to Tahiti—a bit longer there—skip by New Caledonia as soon as possible because it stank of convicts, then on to Indo-China, back through Suez to Syria—and after a few years there, it would be time to retire to a little villa in Provence, or along the Riviera with a nice fat pension from the government, and walls and mantelpieces lined with 'quaint' little curios amassed from their burden-bearing for the Empire. The New Caledonians maintain that the functionaries never stayed long enough in any colony to take an interest in it, or do more than the minimum necessary to continue drawing their salary.

There was a belief in the colony that the French Colonial Office were rather bored about the place, and more or less apologised to officials for having to send them there. Even French capital wasn't very attracted by New Caledonia's potentialities—and many of the largest enterprises in the colony were—and still are—exploited by foreign capital. I heard literally hundreds of times from colonists that France wasn't in the slightest degree interested in the place. 'They're

not interested in us. They've got plenty of other colonies nearer home.'

Many thinking people in New Caledonia believe that the two factors—the centralization of government, and the lack of interest in the place at the Quai d'Orsay—are the main reasons for the haphazard and spasmodic development of the colony. If people can't have a hand in shaping their own destinies, there develops a feeling of 'What the — anyway? We can't do anything about it,' that is fatal to healthy development.

I remember one small example, cited to me to illustrate the stupidity of the centralization of the administration. Leprosy is fairly prevalent in the island, and the local health authorities have been very active in combating it, but for years were in despair over a stupid act which nullified all their efforts. When a case of leprosy was discovered there were two courses open. Either the afflicted person was taken away to the peninsula Ducos, where there is a well organized leper settlement, or under certain special circumstances he could be isolated in his own home. The local doctors had fought for decades over this last practice, not only because it is impossible to ensure that the isolated people didn't contact others, but because they were not even allowed to decide what the special circumstances were that justified 'domicile isolé.' That was decided 13,000 miles away in Paris by someone who had seen neither New Caledonia, a leper or a native hut.

M. Georges Pelicier arrived in New Caledonia as the war-time governor in October, 1939. He had had what is usually described as a distinguished military career, and had been Secretary-General and Acting-Governor of the lovely West Indian isle of Martinique. He didn't go to any trouble to make himself known to the population as he knew his stay wouldn't be long, nor did he inspire much confidence in his leadership. No doubt acting in line with the leaders in France, he introduced a rigid censorship, which left the people even more ignorant of events overseas than they had been before. As in France, too, the censorship he introduced

was used to prevent criticism of his own administration. With a few of the local military leaders as his closest advisers Pelicier shut himself away completely from public opinion.

When France collapsed in June, 1940, there was no mention of it in the local press or the *Government Gazette*, and it was several days after the signing of the armistice that news filtered through, and was passed round by word of mouth from those people who had heard it by foreign radio. The first reaction was a vague feeling that there had been treachery somewhere, and the time had come to break with the government at Bordeaux, and pursue an independent policy.

Public opinion as expressed through the local parliament was unanimous in deciding to cable the government, which had been transferred to Vichy—and demand autonomy for New Caledonia—at least till the end of the war. On 20th June, the Conseil Général met and submitted a proposal to this effect for Governor Pelicier's approval. The Governor refused to send the cable, but promised to make a statement immediately, outlining the attitude to be adopted by the colony. In conformity with the undeniable wish of the majority of the population, he made the following declaration at a special meeting of the Conseil Général on June 24th :

‘Considering that France in full agreement with Britain had promised never to sign a separate peace or truce : Considering that France has signed an armistice with Germany, etc., etc....New Caledonia decides to continue the fight against the Axis Powers at the side of Great Britain.’

The release of this statement was greeted with great enthusiasm, and a crowd of 3,000 people (immense for Noumea) gathered in front of the Hotel de Ville (Town Hall), singing the Marseillaise, and as a symbol of solidarity the British National Anthem.

Something which dampened the enthusiasm of many, however, was the arrest a few days later of one of Noumea's leading citizens, the avocat Maître Verges, a colourful Parisian, complete with flowing cravat and long hair, and an orator of fiery eloquence. His crime ? With two other

leading citizens, Messrs. Mouldous and Prinnet, he had been guilty of preparing a petition demanding local autonomy for New Caledonia with a popular, freely-elected assembly, armed with full executive powers. On June 29th, he was arrested and charged with 'disturbing public morale.'

France's national day approached—the 14th July—and for reasons unexplained to the public, the governor forbade any public demonstrations. This to the resentful public seemed very much like turning the glorious Quatorze Juillet into a day of mourning as 'le Maréchal' had done in France. A group of people, supported by most of the Anciens Combattants (Returned Soldiers' League) organized a demonstration. After a brief ceremony at the War Memorial, they marched to the Governor's residence, a Welsh miner bearing aloft the Tricolour and a Frenchman the Union Jack. Singing the Marseillaise they assembled in front of the official residence, only to find that the Governor had gone for a pleasure jaunt to his establishment at Anse Vata, Noumea's fashionable bathing beach. This occasioned much annoyance to all those who had taken part in the demonstration, and there was a good deal of outspoken comment about his half-and-half enthusiasm and lack of practical support for those who were resisting the pro-Vichy elements in the colony.

On July 22nd Pelicier made another speech at the Conseil Général, reaffirming his earlier June 24th statement. At his meeting a proposal was made by New Caledonia's stormy petrel of politics—left wing member, Paladini—immediately to place New Caledonia under joint Australian-American protection. This suggestion, while gaining some support among the Conseil members, was not considered practical politics by the Governor. The fates were working against Pelicier, however. No sooner had he completed his speech reaffirming New Caledonia's decision to continue fighting at Britain's side, than he was handed the following urgent telegram. The address was Vichy, the signature Petain.

'From information which reaches me from certain colonies, it seems that some governors, by inadmissible defections from



duty, have not exercised or personally supervised the rigorous application of governmental orders. These defections will be mercilessly punished. Cable acknowledgment of this message.'

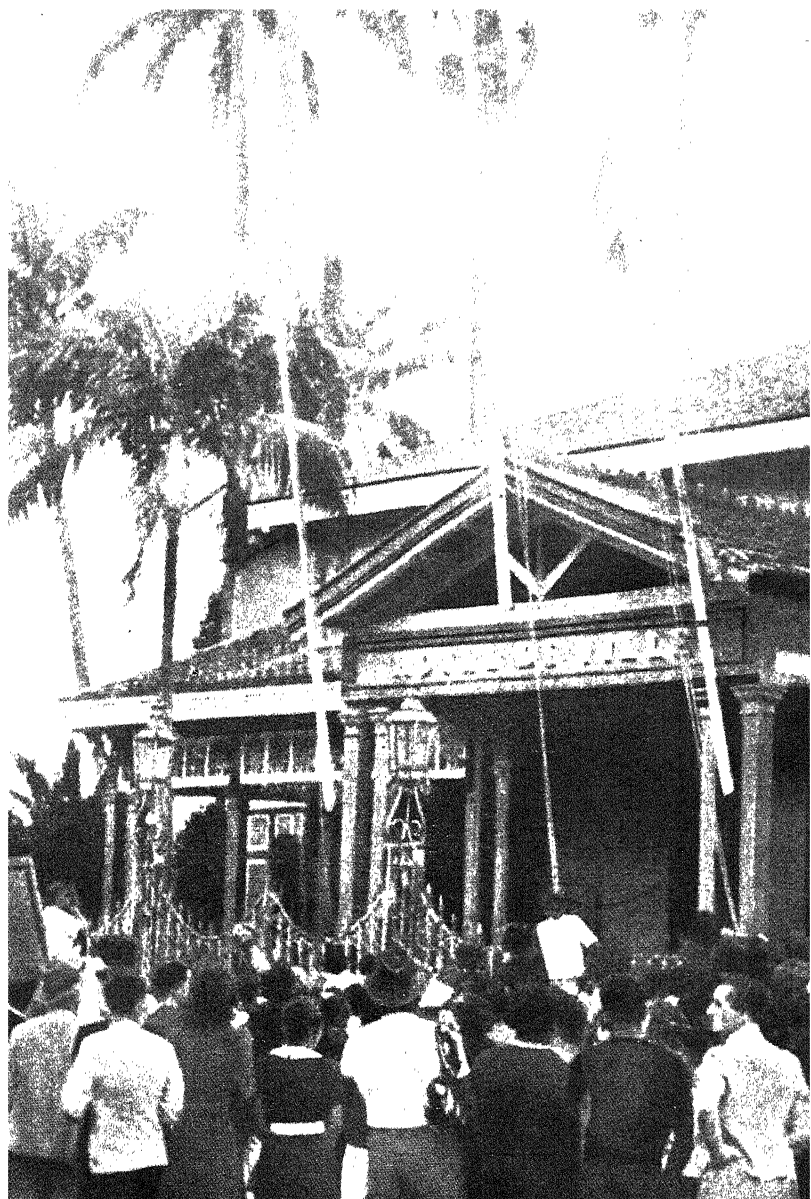
Pelicier was in a quandary. As a military man, Captain in the French Air Force and holder of the Croix de Guerre, he knew only one law—to obey his superior officers. On the other hand his superior officers had broken their word in making a separate peace, and there was evidence enough that the Conseil Général, backed to the hilt by the population, would not obey orders from Vichy. He decided to play for time, and without revealing the contents of the telegram to any but a few intimate advisers, he wired back to Vichy :

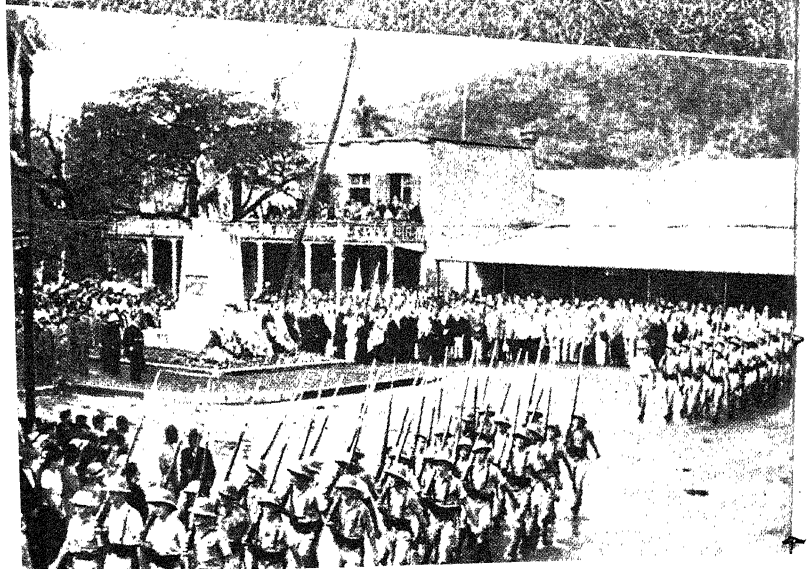
'My decisions taken with full approval Secretary General and Chief Army Commander as being only ones *au fait* with circumstances and geographic situation of the colony, which imposes itself as a brutal fact stop ask you to realize these elements in judging the situation of my colony.'

The people, meanwhile, were looking for some definite action and were harassing the Conseil Général to get something done. Maître Verges had been released, and the petition for local autonomy was gaining popular support. Two days after Pelicier had received the cable from Vichy, the petition demanding local autonomy was presented to the Conseil Général for discussion and on June 26th the latter drew up a four-point programme, demanding a Popular Assembly. Point 4 in the programme stated :

'If the Assembly be formed, in order to be in accord with the republican ideas and concepts clearly affirmed by the population, both the constitution and composition of this assembly shall be decided by referendum of the New Caledonian people.'

Pelicier's reaction to this resolution was eagerly awaited by the people and a large crowd gathered to hear his statement to the Conseil Général the following day. To their amazement and disgust, the Governor made no reference to the demand for autonomy, or to the international situation,





but confined himself to an outline of the revision of customs schedules in view of the reorientation of markets.

If people were disgusted by Pelicier passing over their demands as if they didn't exist, they were excited to fever pitch a couple of days later when on July 29th, to their utter astonishment, the *Journal Officiel* (*Government Gazette*) published the full text of Petain's decree, revoking the French constitution and substituting a totalitarian model, with the mystic Marshal as supreme dictator of France and the Empire. By its publication in the *Journal Officiel*, the decree automatically became applicable to New Caledonia. The Conseil Général felt hardly less outraged than the public, for not having been consulted. It was the first inkling they had had that Pelicier had been in contact with Vichy behind their backs. They felt as strongly as the ordinary citizens that they had been betrayed, when on such an important matter as the abrogation of the 1875 constitution they had not been consulted.

The Conseil Général decided to hold a meeting to discuss Pelicier's action, and when the Governor heard of this he remarked to one of his confidants 'Qu'ils fassent ce qu'ils veulent. Je m'en fou.' (Let them do what they please. I'm sick of it), showing his contempt for the opinion or actions of the local governing body. The Conseil Général passed a long motion which by its pompous wording seemed to indicate that they were a little afraid of their own temerity in taking this unprecedented action of criticizing the Governor. The long statement concluded: 'Considering that this promulgation (of Petain's decree) has been made without consultation with the Conseil Général, the latter disapprove of M. le Gouverneur, and declare that his words and deeds are incompatible... The Conseil Général, in confirmation of the position taken on June 24th, and to avoid all misconceptions, has decided to establish direct relations with General de Gaulle.'

This defiance of the Governor was an act unparalleled in New Caledonian history, and provoked Pelicier out of the lethargy into which he had fallen. On August 5th he replied

to the request for autonomy and a Popular Assembly vetoing the proposal and at the same time rebuking the Conseil Général for their precociousness in daring to have ideas of their own. 'Our isolation from the mother country—at the moment still under the invader's heel—places us in a very peculiar situation,' said M. le Gouverneur. 'The Conseil Général is governed by laws which clearly define its prerogatives. Now at this juncture, it has taken upon itself to comment on questions which are clearly outside these prerogatives, wasting precious time which could well be devoted to matters within its scope.'

In vague terms Pelicier made counter-proposals to form a Consultative Committee, representing various commercial interests, to act as an advisory body—with no executive power. No one was interested in this suggestion, and Pelicier's stocks fell lower every day, despite his desperate attempts to try and win some popularity by granting innumerable interviews, giving radio talks, and even visiting the country centres for the first time in his nine months' stay in the island. Some comments on his visit to the interior, published in the Noumean Press, are illuminating, as they reflect even more forthright criticism than that of the Conseil Général, and typify the traditional sturdy independence of the French man-on-the-land.

*Sarramea.* 'M. le Gouverneur arrived here on the 16th. The visit lasted barely an hour. Of the conditions of the colonists little was said. One expected from the Governor some words of encouragement, of confidence. We believed that those in authority would have some news of the attitude of the colony towards Petain, and if relations would be established with General de Gaulle. Nothing. Not a word. Not the least allusion. The meeting took place without one thought for France, without a single thought to affirm our attachment to her, our faith in her ultimate resurrection.'

*Bayes.* 'The colonists of this region approve of the movement in Noumea to persuade the Governor to change his attitude which so far has been contrary to the interests of New Caledonia. We are at one with those citizens who

demand that our colony range itself alongside the British Empire which fights not only to defend its own territory, but also for the liberation of France. It is inconceivable that our administration should persist in obeying orders from Vichy, which, as a prisoner of Germany, only follows the orders given by that country.'

These are typical of comment which Pelicier's trip aroused throughout the country, and such outspoken criticism of the Governor is remarkable considering that at that time—apart from the Conseil Général—there was no organized resistance, even in Noumea, to the pro-Vichy Governor.

Shortly after Pelicier's return from the interior, a bomb was thrown at his official residence, and although no one was hurt, it served to awaken the Governor to the extent of popular hatred against him. The Conseil Général advised him strongly to leave the country together with his family—otherwise they couldn't be answerable for his safety. The day following the 'attentat,' Pelicier called together some of his closest advisers, including the Secretary General, Bayardelle, a Protestant pastor named Lehnbach, who combined the functions of head of the military intelligence and chief censor; Lieutenant-Colonel Denis, the Commander of the New Caledonian troops, and others. One who was an eye witness of the meeting described it as follows:

The Secretary General maintained that the 'attentat' was not so much a political gesture, as it was an index of the public hatred of the Governor himself. 'They want your departure,' the Secretary General urged. 'If you don't intend to yield, you will inevitably have to resort to force. It is no longer a matter that can be decided by police action either. You will have to go still further, and declare a state of *sirge* with all its consequences.'

Leeutenant-Colonel Denis and other military advisers were in favour of making a fight of it: 'You're going to lose the prize without even playing the game,' one of them remarked. Another was in favour of organizing and arming the 'metropolitains' against the local population. It was

left to Lieutenant-Colonel Denis to propose an astounding scheme devised by himself and Pastor Lehnbach.

Lehnbach, as a Protestant missionary, had considerable influence among the tribes, and he believed that by exploiting the natural antipathy they had towards the whites he could organize them into armed bands to deal with the 'broussards,' the colonists of the interior, whose strong democratic feelings were most feared. To Pelicier's credit he rejected this monstrous suggestion which could only have led to either a general massacre of the white population, or a repetition of the 1878 warfare between natives and whites. Before the meeting closed, Pelicier asked his advisers their opinion on the idea of requesting the armed sloop *Dumont d'Urville* to be sent from Tahiti to Noumea. As some of those present were not willing to aggravate the situation by having a warship in the harbour, the project was dropped.

Four days later, however, the *Dumont d'Urville* dropped anchor in Noumea harbour. As it takes at least ten days to come from Tahiti even Pelicier's most intimate advisers felt they were being 'double-crossed.' It was obvious that Pelicier had taken it on himself to order the warship to Noumea. The arrival of the sloop was commented on unfavourably in the capital, and people began to be restless and suspicious. The day that the *Dumont d'Urville* arrived—August 23rd—Pelicier received a telegram from Sir Harry Luke, Governor of Fiji, and British High Commissioner for the Pacific. Sir Harry was on a visit to the New Hebrides, and wired Pelicier that while he was down in that part of the world he would like to take the opportunity of visiting Noumea.

Once again Pelicier called his intimates together, undecided whether to allow Sir Harry to come or not. Lieutenant-Colonel Denis said he would refuse the boat entrance to the harbour. Commandant Taissant de Quievrecourt, Commander of the *Dumont d'Urville*, on the other hand, said that Sir Harry would have to be received with all customary honours. The Secretary General thought Sir Harry could

hardly be refused, so Pelicier wired back inviting him to come.

The people, meanwhile, had no idea what was going on. Pressure was constantly being exerted on the Conseil Général to demand another 'session extraordinaire,' but Pelicier was anxious to avoid meeting the Conseil again. An 'Ordre du Jour' (Order of the Day) was issued by de Quivrecourt to his officers and men, and some copies of this were smuggled ashore by sailors who sympathized with the anti-Vichyites. Its contents were the last thing needed to fan the embers of public wrath into an open fire of rebellion.

The Ordre du Jour referred to 'unscrupulous agitators' who were carrying on anti-French activities, attempting to influence the marines against executing their orders. The marines were exhorted to have nothing to do with these 'agents of foreign Powers'—Powers which were trying to exploit the present situation to get a footing in New Caledonia. 'It is a matter of sheer treason, and not one of heroic help for Great Britain. The leaders are traitors who deserve the stake, and we will not hesitate to lead them there if they persist in their guilty work.' The Ordre du Jour went on to accuse those Frenchmen who were organizing for Free France, of being actuated by the basest motives of personal gain, and in the pay of foreign Powers. The document concluded: 'I warn you against these criminals and I appeal to your wisdom to reject their advances, and help me in my mission, etc., etc....'

This slanderous attack against those citizens who were the spokesmen of the anti-Vichy public, and were regarded by the majority of the population much more favourably than any officials sent from France, was the height of folly on the part of the Commandant de Quivrecourt.

The day following the disclosure of the Ordre du Jour, the Conseil Général met, and without discussion, adopted a 1,500-word resolution which had been prepared, summarising the course of events from the signing of the Franco-German armistice till the arrival of the *Dumont d'Urville* in Noumea harbour, concluding with the following words :



nervously, refusing point blank their demand for a referendum.

As Denis was Commander-in-Chief of the local garrison, and had control of the gendarmerie throughout the interior as well as a warship anchored in the harbour, he could afford to throw out a challenge of force to the deputation. They accordingly withdrew, and prepared to fight Denis on his own terms.

The Conseil Général was hardly thought of again after its failure in handling the Pelicier affair. The people were out for direct action.

Within a couple of days' sailing from New Caledonia are the New Hebrides, and here the French Resident Commissioner, M. Henri Sautot, had already declared for Free France and established relations with de Gaulle. De Gaulle supporters sent letters to Sautot, and an air mail letter to de Gaulle, but replies never reached them, as they were seized by the pro-Vichy censor, Lehnbach. To compensate for this however, postal employees got control of the cable code, and were able to keep a check on Denis and his communications with Vichy.

Contact was eventually made per medium of Sautot and the loyal post office employees at Noumea, between the Free French committees in New Caledonia and de Gaulle. De Gaulle suggested that Sautot should come over from the New Hebrides and take charge of things in New Caledonia, and urged that the necessary arrangements be made by the local committees.

About this time, important cables were exchanged between the Commander of the *Dumont d'Urville* and the French Admiralty. Thus, on September 5th, the day of Pelicier's departure, *Dumont d'Urville* cabled the French Admiralty :

'Situation still difficult New Caledonia stop principal danger from natives armed by colonists from the interior stop difficulties encountered Conseil Général which follows public opinion and is pushed on by Allied campaign led by Gaullists against *Dumont d'Urville* gaining in popularity.'

A second telegram, despatched the same day, stated : 'I

believe it indispensable to immediately appoint as Governor some High Catholic personality if possible admiral au fait with present situation in France stop Advise his arrival by first opportunity Pan-Airways." Further telegrams despatched the same and following days dealt with the situation in Tahiti, suggesting possible despatch of *Dumont d'Urville* to Papeete and its replacement in New Caledonia by French warships and aviation. Examination of these cables shows that de Quievrecourt was prepared to fight not only other Powers, but also the local population to preserve New Caledonia for Vichy, while Vichy was equally determined to stop at nothing to retain the colony.

On September 7th the French Admiralty again cabled the commander of the *Dumont d'Urville* asking him to establish 'by all means stop I say by all means' stocks of fuel oil at Noumea and Papeete (Tahiti). The Commander of the sloop, de Quievrecourt, was even given powers over Denis's head, and instructed, in an emergency, to govern the colony by any means he thought fit, peacefully if possible, 'but by other means if necessary.' Certain measures were outlined in code, only to be applied should the 'other means' be found necessary.

The contents of most of these cables became known in one way or another to the Free French leaders, and they were making their plans accordingly. One party, headed by M Rabot, a local popular sportsman and small businessman, left for the West Coast—another for the East Coast to explain to the 'broussards' exactly what was going on, and to enlist their support for the trial of strength which was to come. Through their contacts at the post office they were kept in touch with events in Noumea.

On September 16th rumours reached Governor Denis that a plot was afoot to bring M. Sautot over from Port Vila (New Hebridean capital) and instal him as Governor of New Caledonia. Denis called a special meeting of his advisers, attended by the military leaders and the Secretary General. Turning to the latter, Denis, asked :

'Are you au courant with these "furphies" concerning the

arrival of M. Sautot? You can say,' he added, 'that if this rebel Sautot is crazy enough to set foot in New Caledonia, his affair will soon be settled, together with those that are helping him.'

There was much mirth among the assembled military leaders. Belts were tightened, coats straightened, and revolvers fingered in their holsters. One of the military leaders laughed and said he would have great pleasure in personally taking care of M. Sautot, while another courageously declared that for his part he would guarantee to take a machine-gun down to the wharf to meet M. Sautot, and disperse those 'rabbits who thought themselves foxes.'

The following day further messages were received from the French Admiralty telling de Quievrecourt that from information received at Vichy, the situation in New Caledonia was much easier due to dissension among the Free French leaders. The cable also confirmed that favourable commercial treaties had been arranged with Japan for marketing the island's produce. Actually, Vichy agreed to sell Japan the whole of the exports of the colony although it was obvious that such exports—especially the minerals—would be re-exported to Germany. Reference was also made to arrangements which had been made with Japanese and other sources for the establishment of large stocks of fuel oil in the island.

Regarding the position at Tahiti the Admiralty advised that 'The Free French movement interests only a very small section of the population, and providing no English forces appear, I believe the *Dumont d'Urville* can easily handle the situation.'

It seems that Vichy's informants at Tahiti must have been unreliable, as at a subsequent plebiscite, despite official support of Vichy, there were 5,564 votes cast for de Gaulle and 18 for Vichy.

On September 18th, Denis called another conference of his advisers. This time neither Denis nor his advisers were as cocksure as on the previous occasion. Denis himself was extremely excited, and turning to the Secretary General,

announced: 'The information I gave you a few days ago seems to be confirmed. Sautot is due to arrive to-morrow morning on board a small Customs cutter, and the broussards are coming in from the interior with loaded guns to help establish Sautot in power. I have decided on a state of siege in Noumea from 10 o'clock this evening, and I am having barricades erected at Dumbea (cemetery 18 kms. from Noumea, where there is a narrow pass in the road), where all the broussards will be disarmed.'

Towards evening the atmosphere in Noumea became feverish. The evening paper bore an appeal to de Gaullists to rally, and copies of the following telegram were sent to all centres in the interior, where most of the organizers of the movement were rallying the 'broussards.'

'Caledonians !

'We have demanded, insisted in fact, time and again on having a referendum of the whole population, whose patriotic sentiments are well known. We have been consistently answered by formal refusals from the Governor. The hour has come to show that you are willing and capable of taking your destinies in your own hands.

'Every day that passes leads us nearer to a solution which would be contrary to the real will of New Caledonians. Time presses. Prepare immediately to assemble in the greatest number possible on Thursday, September 19th at 6 a.m. in Noumea. You know how to make the necessary sacrifices to defend your rights and liberties. By your will and your courage, of which we are confident, this date will become an historic one in the annals of your country.

'You will be visited by us wherever possible.

'The hour is grave. Keep high your hearts.

'Vive la France. Vive de Gaulle. Vive la Calédonie.

'Signed—Verges, Prinnet, Mouledous and Rabot.'

The *Dumont d'Urville* sent an urgent cable to the French naval station in Indo-China: 'Sudden changes situation New Caledonia stop latest news early clandestine arrival by cutter resident Commissioner New Hebrides Sautot stop people coming from country preparing armed demonstrations stop

Governor proclaimed state of siege, ordering censorship and arrest of leaders stop.' The telegram concluded by giving the names of leading functionaries and their attitude towards the revolt.

Orders were issued for the arrest of the fifteen leaders of the Free French movement, but fourteen of them were away in the interior, organizing the broussards. The fifteenth—a one-armed citizen named Francois Peré—was arrested as he was haranguing a crowd, demanding a referendum. He was handed over to a detachment of marines, and marched down to be locked up on the sloop, which had now come alongside the wharf with its guns trained on the town. The arrest of Peré provoked something like a riot, and crowds marched down to the gun-boat demanding the release of their compatriot.

Patrols of armed marines were marched through the streets under the charge of young officers who made themselves ridiculous, clicking their heels and shouting 'Order. Silence,' before any one had spoken, and ordering their men to charge and clear the streets, where no people had congregated. The poor showing of the gun-boat patrols, caused the local garrison to be brought out. This had an even worse effect—as far as the preservation of discipline was concerned. Most of the troops were local youths who weren't sure what everything was about, but when their own people asked them if they were going to shoot at them, they at first appeared somewhat shame-faced, and then gladly fraternized with the crowd, and for the rest of the evening they marched about together, linked arm in arm, with Noumean citizens shouldering their rifles.

Back in the interior the fourteen leaders had been warned by the postal employees that they would be arrested if they attempted to enter Noumea. Barricades had been erected and machine-gun nests prepared to bar the way of the broussards. It was decided to leave the arms hidden in the bush at Paita—32 kms. from Noumea—and bluff their way, unarmed, past the barricades. The organizers in Noumea, no longer trusting the telephone service, because of the activities of

Lehnbach, decided to establish personal contact with the leaders, and several Noumean women volunteered to slip past the barricades and make arrangements with the broussards waiting at Païta—to have the demonstration at 7 a.m. the following day at the War Memorial.

At 5 a.m. eighty cars and trucks laden with broussards arrived at the barricades, and after their names were first checked over to make sure that the fourteen leaders were not amongst them, and a careful search had been made for arms, they were allowed to continue. In Noumea everything was quiet and orderly, but as there was a feeling of suppressed excitement as of impending big events, business houses had decided not to open. From a high point near Païta, the fourteen leaders were waiting anxiously, and their anxiety was increased when they could see a large ship approaching the pass to Noumea harbour. Was it a French warship arrived from Saigon? In that case the game was up at least for the time being, and the fourteen leaders stood a good chance of being shot as traitors, as de Quievrecourt had threatened.

In Noumea, Lieutenant-Colonel Denis called another conference at 8-15 a.m. This time he was pale and could hardly control his voice. His weakness and lack of decision was pitiful to see, according to eye-witnesses of his conference. He signed a decree ordering general mobilization, but as quickly tore it up, no doubt wondering what would happen if he did mobilize the New Caledonian people. He handed out orders, and immediately countermanded them. He was in constant telephonic communication with the *Dumont d'Urville* and the commander of the coastal defences. He vowed he would not give in to the people without a fight, adding that he wanted to be first killed. Out in the streets a crowd of Noumeans, reinforced by the broussards, had marched to the Town Hall, and after a short scuffle swept across the barricades and furled the flag of Free France on the Town Hall flagpole.

Back in the Governor's residence, the Secretary General remarked that it was now too late to fight. Lieutenant-

Colonel Denis, Commander-in-Chief of the New Caledonian Army, stern soldier as he liked to appear before the world, broke down and cried like a child, threatening to commit suicide.

The ship had now been identified as a Norwegian freighter which had brought M. Sautot from New Hebrides.

Denis ordered the semaphore station to signal the ship, asking why she was there and ordering her immediately to go away. When the crowd read the semaphore signals, they rushed up the steep hill to the semaphore station, and overcoming the resistance of the officials in charge, signalled the visitor to come in through the pass. To their great relief they saw the ship slowly turn and come in through the pass in the reef 18 kms. distant, and head for Noumea.

Meanwhile, the rumour had spread that the fourteen leaders at Paita had been arrested. The broussards, reinforced by Noumeans, jumped into cars and trucks and went out unopposed through the barricades, returning 400 strong armed with guns, clubs, pitchforks—every weapon on which they could lay hands. Back at the barricades the officer-in-charge telephoned the Governor as to whether or not he should use his machine-guns, but Denis, seeing resistance was useless, ordered the officer not to fire.

The leaders went to Denis and said: 'You wanted the matter decided by force. There you have the result. We demand permission for Sautot to land.' Denis refused and threatened to sink the cutter that tried to land Sautot.

'We demand your capitulation,' said one of the leaders, 'your complete capitulation,' and once again Colonel Denis broke down and sobbed.

At 12-30 p.m. M. Henri Sautot landed. The whole population turned out to meet him at the quay, and, chanting the Marseillaise, they escorted him to Government House. After M. Sautot had ordered Colonel Denis to vacate the governorship by 3 p.m. he immediately went to the window from where he addressed the crowd, telling them that from 3 p.m. he would be their Governor.

After Sautot had gone, Denis circularized all his service

chiefs as follows : 'The Lieutenant-Colonel Denis, Governor of New Caledonia and its dependencies, advises all functionaries, police, employees and auxiliaries of the Municipal Councils, that they should obey no other Governor but himself.'

The crowd, infuriated by this new provocation on the part of Denis, went back to Government House, and Denis, scared out of his wits, escaped out of a back window, ran across the gardens to a waiting car, with all the important papers, defence plans, and secret governmental code, and drove to the *Dumont d'Urville*.

Sautot took over the governorship, and the people appointed a Civil Guard until such time as all danger had passed. An armed guard was detailed to watch the *Dumont d'Urville*, and another escorted Colonel Denis to La Foa, a village 120 kms. inland, where he was kept a virtual prisoner.

At 5-30 that afternoon, Governor Sautot assembled all the chiefs of the various services at Government House, informing them that he had been invited by the people, and appointed by General de Gaulle to take over the governorship of the colony. He requested them to remain at their posts and co-operate in carrying on the work of the colony so as to avoid anarchy and the inevitable social repercussions of a people's revolution.

The two days following the revolution were calm enough, but there was a feeling of uneasiness, a feeling as of trouble brewing. At 4 p.m. on September 2nd local troops from the Noumea barracks warned the de Gaullists that a counter-revolution was being prepared. Then, without any excuse all the pro-de Gaulle soldiers were expelled from the barracks. It was learned that the officers and petty officers from the barracks, in co-operation with the marines from the *Dumont d'Urville*, armed with machine-guns, were going to seize strategic points at 9 o'clock that night. The Governor, M. Sautot, was warned of the plot, but with his faith in the pledge which the military leaders had given him, he refused to believe that such treachery was possible.

The leaders of the de Gaullists advised the soldiers to



return to the barracks, try and find out what was afoot, and where possible hinder the plans. The pro-Vichy officers at first refused to let them in, but after some discussion the soldiers re-entered the barracks. With the key of the armoury, which one of the loyal soldiers unearthed, they armed themselves, and handed out rifles to the civilian guard appointed by the de Gaullists, at the same time removing ammunition and machine-gun parts, to sabotage the Vichy officers' plot.

The broussards had all returned to their homes after the revolution seemed won on September 19th, but during the evening of the 21st, telephones were ringing to all parts of the country telling them what was afoot.

The pro-Vichy officers, on their parts, sent despatch-riders to the gendarmes throughout the interior, with orders to prevent the broussards from reaching Noumea. A special courier was sent to Lieutenant-Colonel Denis at La Foa to let him know of the plot. By the time the de Gaullists heard that these special messengers had left, most of the broussards were already on their way into the capital, so word was sent out to the colonists' wives to stop the despatch riders at all costs.

Bands of women turned out along the road, guarding strategic points and bridges with such weapons as were available—spades, rakes and sticks. They carried out their allotted task well, and no courier reached his destination.

The treachery of the Vichy officers had thoroughly roused the broussards. Added to their instinctive dislike of the 'metropolitains' was their wrath at having to turn out again—many of them to hang on the sides of trucks and cars—over 400 kms. of rough road to Noumea. This time they never bothered seeking permission from Governor Sautot, but on their own account they began a general round-up of the pro-Vichy elements.

All the leading military men and functionaries, and many of the gendarmes with their wives and families were arrested, and placed on board the *Pierre Loti*. Apart from two or three, all of them were 'metropolitains.' Altogether, some

250 people were sent away from the colony to Saigon, in French Indo-China, from where most of them proceeded to France.

The whole credit for having made—and saved—the revolution must go to the New Caledonian ‘man-in-the-street,’ or ‘man-in-the-bush’ would be a fitter term. If matters had been left in the hands of the people’s official representatives, it is doubtful if the Vichy elements would have been ousted. The Conseil Général was content to let matters slide, and only moved when the public made such a noise that something had to be done. If the people hadn’t the imagination and energy to behave in the traditional French fashion, and take the law into their own hands, the movement would have weakly fizzled out, with the passing of a few nebulous motions by the official bodies.

It is still too early to prophesy the ultimate effect of the September revolt on the life of New Caledonia. There is a strong opinion in some quarters that the revolt didn’t go far enough—or at least it never consolidated the gains it made. The colony hasn’t achieved its basic demand for local autonomy or independence. Control of the colony has been passed from Petain at Vichy, to de Gaulle at London, but, for the most part, the people are content to let matters remain at that—at least until the war is over.

Some cynics point out that a country that doesn’t exact the utmost concessions when it has strong bargaining power, has little chance of getting any at all when its bargaining power is reduced, and that New Caledonia after war is over will be as far as ever from attaining autonomy. One must remember, however, that the New Caledonians have never been used to wielding political power, and they must be excused if they failed to make the most of their opportunity. Personally, I feel sure there are enough hard-headed citizens in the colony to ensure that New Caledonia will never again occupy the obscure position in the French Empire that she occupied before September, 1940.

## MALTA OF THE SOUTH SEAS

AUSTRALIA, as the nearest 'big neighbour' to New Caledonia, has special obligations towards her. There is plenty of room for improvement in the relations, or more correctly stated, for the development of relations between the two countries. New Caledonians are willing and anxious for closer ties with Australia, while Australians stand a little aloof simply because they know so little of their French neighbour. In at least three directions much can be done and has to be done if New Caledonia and Australia are going to co-operate to make 'Pacific Solidarity' something more than a pretty phrase. The military, commercial and social ties between the two countries must be drawn much tighter.

In New Caledonia it is recognized more forcibly than in Australia that the defence of New Caledonia is bound up with the defence of Australia, and *vice versa*. New Caledonians see quite clearly that if Australia fell, New Caledonia would also fall. They see this much more clearly than Australians see that if New Caledonia fell to an enemy power, Australia would be threatened. Possession of New Caledonia is essential to any Power thinking of attacking Australia.

Five out of every six people with whom I spoke in New Caledonia sooner or later brought up the same question, 'Why doesn't Australia do something about our defence?' Of course most people believe that Australia is doing something in a vague sort of a way, but they look for some more definite signs. The few pro-Vichy propagandists still in the colony naturally sneer, and say, 'What can Australia do to help us, anyway?'

When I was in the colony I should say that 90 per cent. of the population would have welcomed open and obvious signs of Australian co-operation in the defence of the colony,

and with the handing over of Indo-China by Vichy to Japan this percentage has probably increased to 98 per cent. It is a matter of common knowledge that we are doing something about the matter, but there is some extraordinary secrecy about it which is far from encouraging.

Such close secrecy could have two origins. Either one is afraid that the New Caledonians might object to Australia taking a hand in helping to defend their colony, or one is afraid that such co-operation between the two countries will give offence to some third Power. The first reason should be wiped out. When a householder is expecting to have his house burgled, the presence of a policeman patrolling the street outside is always welcome—even though the householder might have an instinctive dislike of policemen. He certainly wouldn't order the policeman away on the grounds that his presence is a provocation to the burglars.

Military authorities have a reputation for preserving a grim silence, which although meant to be reassuring often has the opposite effect. They preserved a grim silence in France, issuing curt, soldierly communiques, assuring the people that they had everything well in hand, when actually everything was very much out of hand. Experience shows that it pays to take the people into your confidence, and as far as New Caledonia is concerned both the Australian and French authorities would have everything to gain by making it clear that they were co-operating to the greatest extent in their mutual defence needs. They can count on the whole-hearted support of their respective populations.

As far as giving offence to a third Power is concerned, there are two obvious answers to this. In the first place, Britain and Free France are allies, so that military co-operation between Australia and the Free French colony of New Caledonia is entirely legitimate. In the second place, there is only one source from which New Caledonia feels herself threatened, and that is from the same country that absorbed New Caledonia's sister colony of Indo-China. Japan is doubtless well informed about the fact of military co-operation between Australia and New Caledonia. There

are 1,500 Japanese in the colony, and a very live Japanese Consul, and it would be strange indeed if they were less informed about such things than the ordinary man in the Noumean streets. Once the fact of such co-operation is established, the harm, from a diplomatic viewpoint, is already done. The extent of such co-operation can only act as a deterrent in proportion to its magnitude.

Why is New Caledonia so important to Australian defence? There are many reasons. It possesses harbours which could shelter the largest fleets in the world, and it is one of the most ideal spots in the Pacific for a seaplane base. An enemy established there could make the island a Malta of the Pacific—and a self-supporting Malta at that. Bombers based on the quiet waters of the wide lagoon which surrounds the island would be within a few hours' flight of our capital cities, three hours from Brisbane and four hours from Sydney. Australia's chief supplies of nickel and chrome—so essential for her armament production—would be cut off, and would be harnessed to the enemy's war industry. New Caledonia's great herds of cattle and deer, her waters teeming with fish, could provide food enough to support a mighty army; her cosy anchorages could serve as bases from which submarines could play havoc with Australia's communications with the outside world.

To the layman New Caledonia seems an ideal country to defend—but this is an asset only so long as the defenders take advantage of it. The same natural characteristics which make defence easy would be turned to good account by an invading force if they happened to get in first. The island is long—nearly 300 miles—and narrow, rarely exceeding 40 miles in width. Through its length runs the *Chaine Centrale*, the high ridge of mountains, broken in parts, but still comparable to an elevated spine. Encircling the island is the coral reef which tames the long Pacific rollers and passes them over gently to swell the calm waters of the buffer lagoon which almost surrounds the island.

New Caledonians claim that with the passes in the reef mined and artillery—not the 1905 model sent out from

France at the beginning of the war—bristling along that spine of mountains which dominates the approaches to both sides of the island, enemy forces could be held off at least until help arrived from elsewhere. Batteries in the 4,000-5,000 ft. high New Caledonian mountain range would be out of range of enemy naval guns, and could be so placed as to present an impossible target to enemy bombers.

Australian naval units and a few squadrons of Australian reconnaissance and bombing planes based in New Caledonian waters would be as welcome as the flowers in spring to the great majority of New Caledonians. Fear of invasion is a real thing to them, particularly in view of the fate of Indo-China. They have a right to know to what extent they can rely on Australian protection, and how effective that protection will be. To satisfy this demand no military secrets need be revealed. Many of the mistakes made so far in this war have been made because some tight-lipped authorities with supreme contempt for the people's legitimate rights refused to take them into their confidence. The Battle of Britain and the fighting in China and Russia have proved that when the people know they have solid support behind them and are taken into the government's confidence, their resistance is increased ten-fold.

As far as economics are concerned, Australia and New Caledonia seem each to be the complement of the other. Despite the artificial restrictions that the Quai d'Orsay put in the way of trade between the two countries, a considerable amount of trade has developed because of stark necessity. The all-powerful Société le Nickel had to have coal for its nickel smelting plant, and no difficulties were placed in the way of importing coal from Newcastle. It was different when the people wanted their bread and butter to come from Australia also. Heavy duties forced them to buy their flour from France, and much of their butter, too.

Now many of these artificial barriers have been removed and a healthy trade is beginning to develop. New Caledonia needs our foodstuffs, our butter, flour, preserved fruits, jams and tinned goods. Above all, she needs our coal. We need

her chrome, nickel and manganese. We can and are now taking her coffee and hides. Australia can assist in many ways the development of the colony, a development that has been held up in the past because it was not in the interests of Continental capitalistic concerns to have secondary industries established in the colony.

Australia, which has passed through the stage where development of her secondary industries was frowned on, should sympathize with New Caledonia and lend a hand to set her on her feet. The idea that colonies and dominions should be market gardens for the home country is outworn. New Caledonia's copra formerly went home to provide the bases for famous French soaps and oils, pearl and tortoise shell to make buttons and toilet sets, hides to make boots and jackets, when most of these things could have provided local industries on the island. Instead of supporting the present reactionary Banque de l'Indo-Chine, which is hated throughout the colony, Australia could lend support to a National Bank of New Caledonia, which could as well finance local industry and the colony's export trade as the Banque de l'Indo-Chine with its head office in Paris and its directors in the Vichy Cabinet.

New Caledonia has lately been in the ridiculous position of having to ration foodstuffs and very many articles that could have been supplied by Australia, while she had thousands of tons of nickel and chrome tied up on her wharves, simply because she lacked the foreign exchange to pay for what she needed. A little sympathetic help from Australia could have avoided that. Even if we had bought the stocks of ore and stored them, or resold them to America, it would have paid us to do so. It would have been a neighbourly gesture to tide the colony over the bad times, especially as New Caledonia's economic difficulties were partly caused by their refusal to sell their minerals to the ally of our enemies.

Because of the cessation of trade between New Caledonia and Japan and Europe, New Caledonia shouldn't have had to send agents running around Australia and the United

States trying to get rid of surplus stocks of minerals and coffee, so that the colony could buy the few consumption goods they needed. A little imagination and good neighbourliness on our part could have taken care of those problems.

Another matter that Australia could take up to help the colony, and incidentally enormously raise Australia's prestige, is the establishment of a direct air line between the two countries. At present New Caledonians wishing to visit Australia must either pack away on a coal boat, which has accommodation for only seven or eight passengers, or else fly to New Zealand and thence to Australia. Often the service to Auckland doesn't connect with the Australian service and the traveller has to stay several days in New Zealand. The fact that the United States subsidizes a service from San Francisco to New Zealand via New Caledonia, and that Australia neither completes the link to Brisbane, nor lets Pan-American Airways continue their service to Australia, is commented on unfavourably in New Caledonia.

It is pointed out that such a regular service across the 800 miles strip of water separating Noumea and Brisbane could perform valuable reconnaissance service during war-time, would help along trade between the two countries, and do more than anything else to establish Australia in New Caledonian eyes.

Much can be done to develop and improve social contacts between the New Caledonians and ourselves. Already most of the colonists regard Sydney as their forefathers in France had regarded Paris. Sydney is the dazzling metropolis to which most of them wish to journey at least two or three times during their lifetime. It would be a generous gesture, and one that would not be forgotten, if our Government made available special concessions to New Caledonian students who wished to study in our higher schools and universities, and even provided a number of free places for those who attained certain standards in the English language.

Why shouldn't our students who wished to finish off their French go over to La Perouse College at Noumea for six or twelve months and learn French in its proper surroundings?



Exchanges of visits could be arranged between returned soldiers, trade unions and farmers' organizations in Australia and New Caledonia. Despite difficulties of language and difference of race, they will find that the things they have in common are more essential than those that comprise their differences.

Above all, Australian official representatives must be made to remember that New Caledonia and Australia are both younger sons of old Empires, and a shirt-sleeve and hand-shake diplomacy is much more apt than that of the silk hat and formal bow of the old days. New Caledonians, like Americans, look to Australia to provide something more virile and realistic and approachable in the way of their official representatives than those that come from the Old World.

If Australia is going to put herself across, it must be in a recognizable Australian way, not as a second-rate imitation of something else. Australia has a tradition of vigorous, if unconventional, progressiveness that was not won under the banner of an old school tie or morning coat, but rather under the slogan of 'achievement or bust.' People outside Australia still look for these qualities in Australians, but it seems lately that we have slipped slightly and are content to drag along behind somebody else's lead.

Australians should remember that in the early days of this century, books describing the social progress in Australia were furtively circulated in Tsarist Russia, and were the subject of innumerable illicit discussion groups which began to draw up the blue prints of an order of society based on that in Australia, when the repressive Tsarist regime was overthrown. Australian social achievement then provided some of the fuel which fed the flames of the 1905 Russian revolution. That was a supreme compliment to Australian social advancement. Universal manhood suffrage, the secret ballot, votes for women, arbitration, and a host of other democratic innovations were introduced in Australia in the Golden Age of this country's progressiveness.

Australians should be apostles of progress, and do what they can to ensure that other less fortunate peoples can achieve the same standard of democratic achievement that they enjoy. Until now New Caledonians have never had the privilege of guiding their own destinies. It should be the profound desire of all Australians that they will soon have the control of the colony in their own hands, and march side by side on an equal footing with other Pacific peoples to the New World Order which peace is going to usher in.

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